SHORT STORIES

No. 769.] Week ending September 26, 1903. [Price One Penny.

"HE MUST NOT BE TAKEN ALIVE!" CRIED THE GIRL, AS SHE HELD BACK THE WOULD-BE RESCUER OF THE DROWNING MAN.

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(A Thrilling Incident from "A TRIAL OF STRENGTH." See inside.)

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SHORT STORIES

No. 769.] Week Ending September 26th, 1903. [One Penny.

A Trial of Strength.

The Story of a Daughter's Devotion and Determination, and of a Lover's Dilemma Between Love and Duty.

"Whose portrait is that, Dorie?" asked Mr. Pearse, placing his hand affectionately on his daughter's shoulder.

She looked up hastily from the cabinet photograph which she had been so intently surveying; both her cheeks and eyes betrayed some confusion, but she answered simply and unhesitatingly:

"It is the portrait of Mr. Lionel Marlowe, father; he is a good friend of mine!"

Mr. Pearse's face became slightly more grave; it had worn a worried appearance when he had entered, but this expression had deepened in intensity on hearing his daughter's reply. He took a seat by her side on the small couch in Mrs. Hiller's somewhat diminutive drawing-room and held out his hand for the photo.

"Let me have a good look at this gentleman, Dorie!" he remarked earnestly. "I conclude, from a little tell-tale blush, that he is a *very* good friend!"

The colour on Dora Pearse's cheeks became deeper, but she gazed fearlessly in his eyes as she handed him the photo, with the two words "He is!" uttered emphatically.

There were many persons who did not understand the character of Dora Pearse, for it was a strange mixture of meekness and fearlessness. She could be gentle and yielding in the extreme, where love or compassion ruled her, but in other respects there was an almost masculine determination about her. Even as one admired the lovely face, with its well-moulded features and crowned by a wealth of nut-brown hair, one was forced to recognise that the lines of that countenance indicated great strength of purpose. "She is a woman who would go through more than the proverbial fire and water for those whom she loved, but also in the cause of justice and honour!" was the opinion inaudibly expressed by this same Mr. Lionel Marlowe; "and yet who can gauge the treasure of love and tenderness also denoted by that face?"

"I like the look of him, Dorie!" Mr. Pearse remarked slowly. In spite of the fact that it was not to his liking to speak out—so much was evident—yet he gave a truthful opinion. "It is a good face; he seems to be the kind of man whom you could trust, but in such an important matter, my dear, you must know more about him than a picture can tell you!"

"I am glad you like him, father!" cried Dorie, drawing a little closer to him and gazing steadfastly at him. "You have always told me that I am a good judge of human nature, and that I can deduce a person's character from the countenance. I am sure that I am not mistaken in Mr. Marlowe! Moreover, I have learnt to know and love him during my stay here! But," she added suddenly, "you have not told me if your business was successful."

"H'm! Partly!" responded Mr. Pearse hesitatingly. He shifted uneasily on the couch. "Are you sure that you are a good judge of character, Dorie?" he continued, turning the conversation to the former topic. "Now," he added, with a smile that was plainly forced, "you often tell me that I am a good, dear—what else is it? Well, for all you know, I might have committed some crime. Do you think that impossible?"

"Oh, father, don't talk in that way! I declare you make me feel creepy! As if that were at all probable! No—you are—but I won't repeat myself! I half believe you are doing it in order to hear me extol your virtues!"

This last suggestion amused her, and she laughed merrily. Mr. Pearse forced a more pronounced smile, but it died quickly away.

"I was trying to show you, Dorie, that it is not, after all, safe to judge by appearances. I have altered my notions lately; I feel that it is possible to believe in the goodness of a person who may yet have something against him! That is why I say that you must learn Mr. Marlowe's character more thoroughly before trusting him or bestowing your affection irrevocably upon him!"

"I cannot understand you to-day, father! You are not yourself, and I am sure that the horrid business is troubling you! Now, tell me the truth about your journey to Wigan!"

Mr. Pearse did not reply for some seconds, at the end of which time he said slowly:

"It will be better to tell you exactly how matters stand,

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Dorie! That is, so far as I know myself! I shall have to leave England and go to the Antipodes, my dear! It is for that reason, in great part, that I am sorry to hear about Mr. Marlowe."

"Why is it, father dear?" she asked, putting her hand caressingly on his cheek. "Have you lost your money? Do not fear to say so; I am brave!"

"No, it is not that—at least, not yet! If I go to Australia I may lose nothing, but if I remain here, I may be a beggar! Perhaps——"

He stopped abruptly and a frightened expression passed swiftly across his face.

"Perhaps what, father?" asked Dorie anxiously.

"Oh, we won't think of anything else than the necessity of leaving this country! I must clear up certain matters, then I shall leave our house as it is and try to sell it, furniture and all, through an agent! Now, my dear, don't bother any more about it! The whole affair is too complicated for you to understand, and I am too worried to dwell on it at present! We must get back to Bramhurst at once; in fact, I am thinking of going back this evening and you can follow to-morrow. I must thank Mrs. Hiller for having had you here! Have you enjoyed the stay in London? Oh, well, I suppose so! This is proof of it!" he concluded, handing the photograph to her.

He rose to his feet to ring the bell, but a sudden thought flashed across his mind, and he turned to his daughter with a genuine smile.

"I haven't asked about the gentleman's means and position, or his 'prospects,' Dorie!" he remarked. "You know, my dear, that I am not a stickler for position, and I shall, if all goes well, be able to provide for you; but a man should have some occupation and be able to hold up his head! I don't want a fortune-hunter!"

"He is about seven years older than I am, father, and I am twenty-three; old enough, as a lady visitor remarked to Mrs. Hiller, to be married and settled. He is not a man of means, but he is rising in his profession, and is considered clever. He has already been sent abroad on several missions on account of his knowledge of languages and his abilities in other directions. He is engaged in a profession which has always had a fascination for me. I am somewhat romantic, you know!"

Mr. Pearse started. "Not——?" he began, but Dora interrupted him.

"Yes, a detective! He chose the profession out of love for it and his father has disinherited him in consequence, or he would be well off! He has told me of some of his work, and I long to be able to help him!"

The girl's eyes flashed with excitement and enthusiasm; her father turned very pale and moved towards the bell. A minute later Mrs. Hiller entered, and the conversation became general on the subject of the return of father and daughter to Bramhurst.

Ultimately it was decided that Dorie should not return till the following day, or the day after that; but Mr. Pearse declared that he himself was bound to go at once.

Dora Pearse was far less gay than usual after the departure of her father, and good-hearted Mrs. Hiller wisely considered that it was better to leave her to her own thoughts. It was not a pleasant outlook. She had given her heart to Lionel Marlowe, whose acquaintance she had made in a manner that appealed to her romantic nature; no formal engagement had been entered into, but she loved him, and the engagement was a mere formality, to be consummated after her father's return. And now she was torn between two troubles; if she married Lionel Marlowe, she must remain in England, while her father, whom she loved with a devotion rarely met with, must live alone at the other end of the world; and if Marlowe gave up his friends and his career here, in order to go with her and her father, that step would probably blight his prospects.

Then there was her father's unhappy position. They had lived comfortably during the last ten years in a modest country house at Bramhurst, Sussex; her father had told her that he had made a fair amount of money by a lucky speculation, but that he had determined to live quietly on the interest instead of endeavouring to increase it by continuing in business.

"I might live in grander style," he had said, "but I think that I am happier in this modest way and without the worries of commerce. Of course, I am somewhat interested in business, so to speak, as my money must be made to bear fruit in the way of dividends."

It had not always been so; in the earlier years of their married life Mr. and Mrs. Pearse had known hard times, and the great grief of her father was that Mrs. Pearse had succumbed to typhoid fever within three months of the lucky speculation.

All had gone well till within the last week. Dora had come to London for a month's holiday, while her father had gone on a fishing excursion, with the intention of rejoining her at the end of a fortnight; but business had first taken him back to Bramhurst and then to Wigan, with the result that has just been made known to us.

Dora's rather unpleasant reverie was broken by the arrival of Mr. Lionel Marlowe. For a time all Dora's sadness was dispelled, and it made Mrs. Hiller sigh for the hopefulness of youth, and live her own courtship over again as she watched the frank greetings exchanged by the lovers.

"I am pleased to see you, Mr. Marlowe!" said Mrs. Hiller candidly. "I hope you will be able to drive the blues away from our young friend!"

Marlowe turned an anxious look of inquiry towards Dora, who did not answer, but moved to the couch. Marlowe followed her, and they sat together at one end of the room, while Mrs. Hiller was busy with some lacework at the other.

"What is it, dear?" asked Marlowe earnestly, taking her hand and gazing with a lover's ardour upon her beautiful face, now slightly pale. "Let me know all about it, and perhaps I can chase the trouble to—to the other side of the globe!" he finished, unwittingly touching the very topic.

"That's just what is the matter!" cried Dora, smiling in spite of herself. And she told him.

Marlowe was grave. It was a severe blow to him to think of throwing up his career in the old country, but his mind reverted to an heroic moment, and his love for her conquered all else.

"If it really comes to that, I will go with you!" he declared decisively. "So that settles it, and we will not think of it any more, except to hope that your father's affairs will right themselves swiftly. Now let me explain a fresh task that has been given to me!"

"Yes, yes! What is it?" asked Dora eagerly.

"It is a curious case, in its way," said Marlowe. "It seems that about ten years or so ago, a man's life was insured for £10,000 by an outsider; that is, not by the man himself. The insured person was healthy, and the premium was ordinary. But it proved to be a bad bargain for the insurance company. The insured, to use the technical term, went to a certain seaside town not very well known to holiday-makers, contracted typhoid fever, and died. The insured lived rather a nomadic existence, being a man of independent means, staying at this place and that, so that the insurance company were more particular concerning proof of identity than would otherwise have been the case. However, the proofs were forthcoming, and the money was paid.

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"Nothing more was thought of the case till a few days ago, when a man made a death-bed confession which was forwarded to the insurance company. This man stated that the whole thing was a fraud on the insurance company; he was the man who impersonated the insured, and he was employed by Palmer, the insurer, to do it. He went about the country with the avowed object of getting hold of a body—there are many unidentified dead bodies picked out of the rivers, or found in unwholesome localities. This body would be passed off as that of the insured, and certain papers would be inserted in the pockets to insure success. Of course, the live man would disappear, and Palmer would come forward and identify the body as that of the man whose life he had insured.

"Fortune appears to have favoured these rascals, for they got hold of a man whom they found unconscious on the roadway of a West of England town. It seems that Granger—that's the impersonator—knew something of medicine, and said that the man would not live long. He took the unfortunate man in hand, and exchanged the contents of his pockets for certain papers. He even had the audacity to exchange clothing; or rather, he got some new clothes for himself, then dressed the poor fellow in his (Granger's) own. All this time the wretched man was dying of typhoid fever."

"How terrible!" murmured Dora, her eyes moist with pity for the hapless man at the mercy of rascals. The next instant they were aflame with indignation. "And now there is an opportunity to bring them to justice and you are to do it?"

"Granger is dead," returned Marlowe. "I thought that the two villains had contributed to the death of the stranger by their treatment of him and by the delay, but Granger on his death-bed vowed that it was not so, and that the stranger could not have recovered. It was arranged that Granger should inform the police and see that the man was removed to the hospital, where he died. Palmer went off to London to avoid suspicion. The stranger was not unlike Granger in appearance and it was less suspicious to die of typhoid fever than to be pulled out of the water. That is why I said that fortune favoured them.

"When the stranger died, Palmer's address was found among his papers. Palmer was communicated with and identified his friend. The insurance company made inquiries, but the rascals had planned the thing well, and the money was paid. Granger, I find, did not know the amount of the insurance; he thought it was for £2,000, and he received £1,000—half the proceeds, as he thought."

"And have you any clue to Palmer?" asked Dora eagerly. "He ought to be severely punished!"

"Granger did not know his real name or much about him, and ten years have elapsed, remember. Granger described him, and the description was communicated to the police both there and in London. And just now I have been told that one of the policemen of Wigan says that he caught a glimpse of a man answering somewhat to the description only yesterday, but was unable to follow him for the obvious reason that the officer was leaving the railway station in a train and saw the man on the platform as the train ran out. Subsequent inquiries have produced other information, which I needn't repeat to you, and to-morrow morning I am going to Bramhurst, Sussex. What do you think of that, dear?" he cried with a laugh.

He had not noticed her countenance for the last two or three minutes, and he was struck, on raising his eyes, to observe the deathly pallor of her face. He did not know that she was repeating to herself: "Ten years ago! Wigan! Bramhurst!"

"What is the matter, Dora?" he cried in alarm. "Are you ill?"

Then the determined nature of the girl manifested itself; with an effort she recovered herself, laughed, and forced some colour into her cheeks by a strain of the breath.

"I think your story unnerved me for the moment!" she cried, with a semblance of gaiety. "What is the description of Palmer? I know most of the people in Bramhurst, you know, and I might help you!"

She waited with bated breath for his reply, and her heart sank as she recognised a rough description of — her father! In spite of her great effort, the blow almost stunned her for the moment; but the effects passed away quickly in the face of the great danger that threatened her parent. Perhaps he was not the guilty man, yet—— Merciful Heavens! how the details fitted in with certain facts! Her father's own words, too, about having committed crimes! She sat still for a moment; she had forgotten Lionel's presence. He reminded her of it by asking:

"Do you recognise him?"

"I am afraid I cannot help you!" she rejoined, shaking her head slowly.

He did not know that it was an evasion, so he merely smiled and said that he hoped to get to the bottom of the matter in double-quick time when he reached Bramhurst, for which place he would take an early train in the morning.

"You once said that you would be willing to do me any favour that I might ask, Lionel!" she said suddenly, laying her hand on his. "Do you mean it? I may claim that favour!"

"I will do it if it is possible!" he replied with a laugh. "I am only human, mind, so do not expect the supernatural!"

At this juncture, much to Dora's relief, Mrs. Hiller intervened.

"You don't look well to-night, Dora! You have been worried! I really think that you ought to lie down or go to bed, notwithstanding the early hour!"

"I agree, Mrs. Hiller!" observed Marlowe, rising. "I will take my departure and leave her in your care. If you go to Bramhurst to-morrow, my dear, I may see you there, and I should like to be introduced to your father!"

It was with difficulty that Dora repressed a shiver at this remark, but she contrived to escape observation by stooping to pick up her handkerchief.

Scarcely had Marlowe quitted the house than Dora astounded Mrs. Hiller with the statement that she must return to Bramhurst at once.

"But, my dear child," expostulated Mrs. Hiller as soon as she had recovered from her amazement, "you couldn't get there till nearly midnight! And——"

"Don't stop me, Mrs. Hiller!" pleaded Dora. "But help me by coming to the station with me!"

Finding all expostulation vain, Mrs. Hiller acceded to the request for help. And so it came about that Dora Pearse entered Bramhurst Lodge at midnight, twelve hours in advance of the detective-lover, who was to seek and arrest her father for a grave crime!

To her dismay, her father had not returned and she was left to conjecture that he had not carried out his original intention of going straight to Bramhurst at once. She did not go to bed; it was unlikely that he would appear before morning, but she could not rest, although she assured the startled housekeeper (whose repose she had interrupted) that she would retire within a few minutes.

The night dragged its weary length away, but Dora remained waiting, and racked by the anxiety that the arm of the law would reach her father before she could warn him. In the morning breakfast was brought to her, but she could not eat. It was near mid-day when she heard the sound of wheels; she started to her feet and looked out, half expecting

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to see Lionel's figure in the cart, but it was her father—at last!

When he entered the room and saw her, he shrank from her and for an instant he seemed inclined to flee. That movement confirmed her suspicions! She went to him with outstretched hands.

"Father!" she cried in tones of agonised appeal. "Is it true?"

The guilty man trembled; with a wild cry he fell on his knees before her and gazed at her beseechingly.

"Dora, Dora!" he wailed piteously. "Are *you* going to turn from me?"

It was a terrible picture, the father kneeling before the daughter and appealing for both forgiveness and help in that wild cry!

"I was poor! Your mother was ailing, and you were wanting better nourishment as well as she! Luck was against me! I was desperate and temptation came! But I have suffered for it, suffered bitterly! And now the police are after me, and it will be prison for me, and disgrace and poverty for you, unless we get away before my identity is discovered!"

Despite his guilt and degradation, the inborn love for her father conquered every other feeling in Dora's breast. She caught his hands and raised him to his feet. She was calm and determined.

"No, I will not turn from you, father! Hasten, for you have no time to spare. Get your things together and fly as quickly as you can, for the police are already in the village, searching for one whose description resembles yours!"

Hurriedly, and with scarce a word, the father and daughter made their preparations for flight, but they were too late. As they left the Lodge on foot and hastened down the road and walked swiftly along the main street, hurrying towards a lane that would take them to another village where escape would be easier, Marlowe's figure appeared higher up the uneven thoroughfare.

Dora uttered a little cry. Pearse instinctively divined its meaning, and dashed forward in order to get to the lane and disappear.

Marlowe saw the burly figure, but in his excitement failed to recognise Dora. In a moment Pearse had vanished down the lane, and Marlowe was running at full speed to the narrow turning, down which he also disappeared.

Summoning all her strength, Dora followed, calling to Lionel to stop. He did not hear her, but raced after his quarry.

Suddenly, as she ran along the lane, Dora heard a splash, and then there was a cry uttered by Lionel Marlowe. She reached the bend in the lane and saw her father struggling in the centre of a wide and very deep pool, while Marlowe stood aghast at the side.

"The fool will drown!" cried the young detective. But then his professional pride took the upper hand, and he exclaimed: "Not if I know it! He sha'n't escape me like that!"

He threw off his coat and waistcoat and was about to leap into the water to save and capture the would-be suicide, when he felt his arm grasped by a hand that closed over it like a vice. Turning with an angry exclamation, he saw the white, set face of Dora Pearse!

What followed was a matter of seconds, although it may take minutes to tell it.

"He is my father!" cried Dora. Her voice was calm, notwithstanding the storm that was raging within her. "He must not be taken alive! Will you let him go free for my sake? Shout to him that he may live and escape—for my sake! I claim the favour you promised me, Lionel!"

She had saved him from terrible injury, perhaps from death, when his bicycle had skidded on the wet road and had thrown him almost under the feet of the omnibus horses. It crossed his mind in a flash how that this apparently weak, slim girl had seized the heads of the horses and had turned them aside, saving him before he had properly realised the position! And now she claimed the reward, and asked him to act dishonourably to his chosen vocation!

The struggle was sharp, but brief.

"I cannot be false to the trust placed in me, not even for your sake, my love!" he cried in anguish. "Unhand me, Dora, and Heaven have pity on us all!"

He strove to free himself, but she held him tightly.

"You shall not save him to take him to prison!" she cried. "He is my father and you shall not save him!"

"He will drown!" he cried desperately. "Would you have him die? You do not realise that he is drowning!"

"Better death than the disgrace of the prison!" she replied, with terrible earnestness.

He had been one of the very few who had really comprehended the complex character of Dora Pearse, but even he was not prepared for this stoical conduct. It staggered him for an instant; he heard the appealing cry: "For my sake!" and then he threw her aside roughly and sprang into the water, while Dora Pearse fell on her knees and in her heart she hoped that he might be too late!

She watched him as he swam to the spot where she had last seen her father, and then the awful ordeal proved too much even for her, and she fainted.

It was nearly a month after that terrible scene before Dora Pearse returned to a full consciousness of her surroundings, for Heaven had been merciful to her, and an attack of brain fever had prevented her from knowing what was passing. When she recovered, the affair was forgotten except by those immediately concerned. The money unjustly obtained from the insurance company had been safely invested by Pearse and had been added to; therefore, when the amount of the premium was deducted from the £10,000, it was found that the balance was intact, and this was restored to the company. Of course the company had lost the interest on the money for a long period, but it was glad to have the capital returned.

It was not till Dora was on the high road to recovery that good Mrs. Hiller ventured to mention Marlowe's name.

"He wishes to see you, Dora!" she said simply. "Don't break his heart by refusing!"

So Dora assented and Marlowe came in. Each noted how much the other had aged in that one short month!

"Can you forgive me?" asked Lionel softly. "I, too, have suffered since then, but it was my duty!"

"It is I who should ask for forgiveness for tempting you!" she replied gently. "But he was my father!"

He took her hand and kissed it, and shortly afterwards he left her.

Two years have passed; Lionel Marlowe gave up his vocation, and his father withdrew his malediction, and has even gone so far as to say that if Lionel *will* marry Dora Pearse, why, "I suppose I must agree, for it will look foolish to disinherit him again!" From this it will be seen that Lionel still hopes to be united to his loved one, while Dora herself is coming to the conclusion that there will be a day when she can give him her hand to accompany the heart which passed into his keeping long ago!

G. Bramley.

To Story Writers.

We shall be pleased to consider complete novelettes of about 20,000 words in length, and to pay cash down for those accepted. Manuscripts must be type-written (or very legibly hand-written), and should be sent to The Editor, *Short Stories*, Henrietta Street, London, W.C. Postage for return of MSS., if unsuitable, should be inclosed.

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. . TWO . . ENGAGEMENTS.

A Tale of Happy Coincidences.

NINA is sitting on the fresh young grass, among the apple-blossoms. The bright girl was not unlike an apple-blossom herself, in her pink-and-white dress of clear muslin.

Nina was not a beauty by any means; but nineteen healthful, happy years had given her the charms and graces of a pure contented maidenhood—gentle eyes, a smile like sunshine, oceans of light-brown hair, and a strong, quiet heart.

The young man whose length of supple limb lay stretched beside her, among the devastated clovers, was decidedly handsome, with his light curling hair, almost golden in its brightness, and dark eyebrows, arched over lovely, melancholy dark eyes.

His straw hat was on the grass beside him, and he was leaning rather uncomfortably on his elbow, with his luminous gaze fixed persistently on the absorbed, yet smiling face above him.

There had been quite a long silence between these two, who were here alone in this blossoming orchard, with the soft, fragrant petals showering down around them, and no other company but vagrant butterflies and hard-working bees to share their solitude.

When the young man spoke at last, it was in a very discontented voice:

"You know very well I want to speak to you, Nina. You know I sent the children away for no other purpose; I must speak to you. But you sit there counting your stitches, and looking so cool——"

"I don't count them," she answered good-humouredly, and letting her eyes rest on his an instant. "Dear me! what a frowning forehead! Well, then, why don't you speak? I shall be delighted to hear anything you may have——"

"I don't want you to be delighted," he interrupted shortly. "And do, for mercy sake, put that eternal needlework away! I would like your undivided attention for once."

The tatting was instantly disposed of in a convenient apron-pocket, and the nimble white hands clasped each other, at rest.

"Am I not good and obedient? Now for the wonderful story. If you really are coming to confession, Star, why, that is just splendid!"

"For the listener? See here, Nina, you have heard me speak of—of Laura Dalton, haven't you?"

"Never. You have never mentioned her name until this moment, Star, and you know it!"

"Of course I know it. Who said I didn't? Well, I'm going to mention her now. I met her at my aunt's when they lived in Ashington three winters ago. She is an orphan—a sort of ward of Aunt Maggie—and when I had known her two months we were engaged."

"Very rational on both sides. You were then nineteen. At what period of her infancy was Miss Dalton?"

"Well, sixteen, perhaps. She has been at school in Germany ever since, until a month ago. But the worst of it is, Nina," he added, stretching out his hand and laying it on hers, "we are engaged at this present moment."

If he had expected to meet any stormy demonstration of surprise, or grief, or anger, he found himself wonderfully mistaken. The tranquil blue eyes widen a little, and the colour deepens slightly in the rounded cheeks, but the sweet voice replied, in its usual clear tone:

"How strange of you, Star, not to speak of this before? And why should it be 'the worst of it' that you are still engaged?"

"Because I am very unhappy, and because I do not love poor Laura. She is such a foolish, frivolous creature—just a big, warm-hearted child, that is all. Tell me, Nina, dearest," strengthening his pressure on the passive fingers, "haven't you known all along—ever since that first night when we walked home through the beech woods from Aunt Maggie's—haven't you known that I loved you?"

"Yes," she said, in almost a whisper, "I have known it, Starwood."

"And you wondered that I could keep silence?"

"Yes," she said again, very softly. "But then you knew of *my* engagement."

"Your engagement? Nina please don't begin about that. A wretched arrangement between fathers and mothers. I've no patience to speak of it. You know very well you will never marry Doctor Leslie."

"Of course I will marry him," opening still wider the soft blue eyes. "I wonder at you, Star."

"You won't marry Doctor Leslie, and for a very good reason, Nina; you will marry me."

"Starwood!"

"For Heaven's sake, don't look at me like that; I have not proposed to kill anybody. It is only this, dearest—I *cannot* marry Laura Dalton when my whole heart belongs to you, and I know, too, that you care for me dearly—dearly."

"I care for you too much to let you act dishonourably," she answered steadily; but there were tears in her drooped eyes, and she unclasped her hands to take his own into their gentle embrace. "You should have spoken before. It is all so strange to me. And the girl—Starwood. Does she love you?"

"That's the trouble. She loves me to distraction. Her little letters break my heart. She is so happy in the thought of our marriage. It was arranged to take place next month. And she is coming to Aunt Maggie's the day after to-morrow. Nina, I think I will run away!"

"You could not be a coward, Star."

"Come with me, Nina," he said, a world of intreaty in his tone. "No, but I *am* in earnest. Why should we sacrifice ourselves to lives of misery. Doctor Leslie cannot feel for you as I do. It is almost a year since he has seen you even.'

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"He does love me. Oh, Star, if you knew. I am all the world to him, and he has waited and worked. I could not be so wicked. He is coming back soon. He has finished his course in Paris, and—do you think we two could ever be happy together if we had made others wretched. It is sin to speak of it, even. No, dear, there is nothing for us but to do our duty. We have been so happy, as friends—we can be friends still."

"But you love me, Nina? Tell me truth, dearest; nothing will seem so hard to bear after that. Only say it."

He had drawn so near that his cheeks rested against her slender shoulder.

Nina did not answer, but her arm slipped timidly round his neck, and she rested her cheek against his curling golden hair. After the fashion of maidens, she answered her love in silence.

This exquisite moment was suddenly broken in upon by the sound of scampering feet and ringing voices, and the children came rushing pell-mell through the orchard-gate.

"Mr. Burley! Mr. Burley! we couldn't find your cigarettes. We looked on the porch-seat and on the window-sill and everywhere, and they were not there. And, Nina, mamma says you are to come in and make the cake, and mamma says *we* can stay with Mr. Burley!"

"Oh, thanks!" said Mr. Burley.

But, after all, they were Nina's brothers, and that thought reconciled him to bear for a while the noisy infliction of their company.

* * * * *

A shadow darkened the morning sunshine. Nina looked up from reckoning the weekly household accounts, and saw in the long open window the loveliest young woman she had ever beheld.

"Miss Marble, Nina?"

Nina's heart quaked, but she went forward with a welcoming smile.

"I am Laura—Laura Dalton. You have heard of me?"

"Oh, yes, yes!" said Nina, blushly slightly, but looking bravely into brilliant hazel eyes—lovely, wonderful eyes, so thickly fringed with fine black lashes. "I am so glad to see you! It is so kind of you to come!"

"Star promised to bring me, but I would not wait. You will think it dreadful of me to rush in without ringing the door-bell; but I saw you from the garden, and I knew you were Nina. Star has written me so much about you! I ought to be jealous, but I won't be. You're too sweet. Aunt Maggie has told me lots about you. It is so nice for her to have such pleasant neighbours. What a lovely place they have! I have been abroad three years."

"Mr. Burley told me," said Nina, helping to divest her visitor of a coquettish hat and her coat, and laying bare her magnificent coils of shining black hair.

"He has told you everything, I suppose? Dear Star! I find him changed—so dull and spiritless."

"He was not very well," Nina hastened to say, with a tell-tale flush on her face. "At least, when he first came to Mrs. Creigh's, he was recovering from typhoid fever, and he—I suppose——"

"That was nine months ago," was the prompt rejoinder. "He wrote me all about the typhoid fever, and that he had entirely recovered. But he seems strangely altered. I think it is not good for a man to have enough money to live on without work. It would be better if he had a profession. You have seen a good deal of Star, I suppose, since you've been acquainted?"

"Oh, yes! My brother Clarence and he are quite intimate."

"He did not tell me about Clarence. He told me about you," said the young lady. "I was so anxious to see you! Of course you know that he—that I—— You do know, Nina, don't you?"

"About your engagement?" asked Nina, smiling gravely. "Star will have a beautiful wife."

"I hope he may have a happy one"—with a little sigh. "He is such a lovely fellow. But, somehow, I don't think it is nice to be married so very soon. The second of next month—just think!—and I am only nineteen! No one knew of our engagement except Aunt Maggie, and now she is so anxious to have every one know, and to have us settled; and I like to be single, don't you? It seems dreadful just to leave school and then be married. I haven't had any good time."

"Why not postpone your wedding for a while?" asked Nina, smiling at the frankness of her beautiful visitor. "You are both so young!"

"Ah, but poor Star would object! He would be so terribly disappointed, you know. He has been looking forward to our marriage. But I was thinking, Nina, perhaps you could talk to him. He has such confidence in your judgment. You might tell him that you think I am too young. You understand him so well. You would know just what to say. You will think I am the strangest girl in the world to come here and talk like this; but, don't you see, I can't speak to Aunt Maggie, and I dare not to poor Star, and there is no one else. I will be married before I know it, Nina, if I don't make some effort."

Tears were dimming the lustrous dark eyes.

Nina, touched and astonished, drew a little chair close to her new friend's side, and took her hand in a kind clasp. At this, Laura burst into tears.

"You will think I am a silly!" she said, presently, with a little sob now and then between her words, "but your lovely, sweet face won me in a minute. I don't mean that you are handsome, but you *are* so lovely! And that dear little calico apron! I couldn't be afraid of *you*, Nina. Of course, I didn't mean to be so frank with you all at once; but I could never like you any better than I do now, and I can't help speaking my heart right out. I want you to reason with Star—not reason exactly—but show him—make him understand—well, tell him something——"

"Ah, but you must tell me something first, Laura. Isn't there someone else—someone who has taken Star's place in your heart? Is not *that* the trouble, Nina?"

"Oh, Nina, Nina!"

"I thought so. Tell me, Laura, how it happened. Tell me all about it. Then we can consult."

"You little darling! I have felt like a criminal; but if you could only see him, Nina! I met him in Paris when I was spending the holidays with a schoolmate. He was studying with her father, Professor Vieux. There were lots of students, but this one is a young Englishman—so talented and so handsome—and we fell in love with each other at first sight. It was terrible, Nina—so awfully sudden and unexpected; but, don't you know, he was quite wild about me, and I was just as bad about him. And he is engaged to a girl out here—he would not tell me her name; but he does not love her at all—at least, since he's known me, he doesn't. But then, you see, his words bind him, and he is so honourable! He is coming over in a few weeks, and I thought, if I need not be married so soon—don't you see?—that possibly something might happen——"

Miss Dalton was so busy dabbing her lovely wet eyes with her damp handkerchief that she was not aware of the sudden pallor that had overspread the listening face beside her. Now Nina interrupted her in a curious voice, very steady, but very eager, too.

"What is your lover's name, Laura, if it be a fair question?"

"His name? Do you think I ought to tell his name? I *will* tell you. His name is Doctor Leslie."

"Ah!"

A little cry, a gasp, escaped Nina's lips, but was checked back instantly.

"Do you know him?" Laura asked, with a wondering air.

"I know the girl he has promised to marry, and I have seen the letters he has written her, so full of tenderness. She never dreamed his love could waver. Laura, this is terrible!—the surprise!"

"I know it, dear," said Laura penitently; "but what can we do? I'm sure we don't compel ourselves to love. Love compels *us*. How strange *you* should be acquainted with Doctor Leslie's affianced! It seems just like a story. Is she

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nice? He would never say anything about her except 'poor child!'"

"Poor child!" echoed Nina, with a smile. "She would only be poor child if she should marry him. I could tell you about her, too, Laura, how she has struggled to keep faith with her faithless lover, while her heart had given itself to someone else. She has suffered, but at least she has been strong. Ah, Laura, what must we think of men?"

"What must we think of women?" said Laura simply. "I am sure I am ashamed of myself. If Star could know——Nina, oh, Nina, there *he* is!"—rushing suddenly to the long open window—"but I tell you it *is* he! They must have told him I was here, and he is coming. Oh, oh, oh! what shall I do! Oh, Nina, I am so glad!"

Nina, following her impetuous friend, saw not Starwood Burley, but Doctor Leslie advancing up the gravelled path in travelling coat and with a small bag in his hand.

As he reached the verandah, which was liberally vine covered, Miss Dalton sprang through the window and rushed to him with outspread arms. At sight of this beautiful apparition an unmistakable delight flashed over his fine, dark face.

"Laura!" he exclaimed, and dropped his baggage to fold her promptly to his bosom; then he hastily released her, and his joy gave place to consternation.

He actually staggered back as his betrothed advanced, with her hand held out in greeting.

"Nina!" He said no other word as she lifted her little quiet face to kiss him in friendly fashion.

Miss Dalton stood amazed.

"You know, Nina, too? I thought Mrs. Creigh had sent you here? I thought you were coming to find *me*," she falters. "Oh, Gilbert!—oh, Nina! Oh, Nina, are *you* the girl?"

Miss Dalton was deathly pale, and Doctor Leslie groaned and hid his white face in his hands.

Nina was trembling a little, and tears were on her lashes, but she smiled up at them both.

"I am the girl—the happy girl, dear Laura. How strange you should come at this very moment, Gilbert! I did not expect you until the twentieth. Laura had just been telling me she had met you abroad, and all the little romance. But come in. We must sit down and talk together."

* * * * *

"Robbie—Robbie, will you run up to the house, like a good fellow, and tell Nina I want to speak to her. I'm going to bring you that new fishing-rod to-morrow—honour bright. Tell her I am waiting here at the gate; and don't let all the world hear you, that's a little man!"

Down through the twilight came Nina, a minute later, in her gleaming white dress, to find Starwood Burley lurking in the shadow of the trees at the gate, and smoking cigarette after cigarette.

The house-windows were alight, and the stars were brightening momentarily in the vast silence overhead. Fireflies were throbbing in and out of the dusk, and now and then a bat wheeled by in dark circles.

The dew was falling, and the fragrance of the garden was blending with the scent of Starwood's tobacco, which he hastily consigned to oblivion when Nina appeared.

"Will you walk along the road a little way?" he asked abruptly, without greeting of any kind. "That is, if you will be *permitted* to walk with me now—if you are not afraid."

"I am not afraid of anyone," said Nina brightly; "not even of you, and your scowling face is just terrifying, Star."

She stepped down beside him, and they walked away slowly under the great branches of the elms and chestnuts, along the quiet country road.

"I suppose I must congratulate you on the arrival of your—of Doctor Leslie. Laura informed me that he had arrived this morning, while she was with you."

"Thanks, yes. He came quite unexpectedly. He wanted to give me a surprise, and it was a surprise."

"You are delighted, of course."

"I am very, very happy," she answered gently; "I never thought to be so happy."

And of her own free will she laid her hand within his arm, and leant confidingly on its support.

"I suppose I ought to rejoice in your happiness, dear," he rejoined forlornly; "but I'm such a selfish wretch, and I've been so very fond of you all this time, it seems horrible that I must give you up, and try to live out my miserable life with someone else. I wish to Heaven I had never seen you, Nina."

"I don't!" glancing up at him with smiling eyes. "You are ungrateful, Star. Only think of the pleasant walks and talks which we had together, all the good quiet times. I know I shall never forget them, and I shall never be sorry we met. I wonder, dear, if we should always be so happy—if you would always like me so much, supposing we could belong to each other?"

"Oh, don't, Nina! don't talk about it!" He looked down longingly at the little clinging hand on his coat-sleeve. "You make a coward of me. In all honour, I have no right to be here with you now; but Laura intimated that you wished to see me, and I came, Nina, but only to say 'Good-bye.' I can't bear this sort of thing. We must not meet any more. By-and-by, perhaps——"

"Star," said Nina, standing still before him suddenly in the darkened road, lonely now as a forest-path. "I am the happiest woman in the world to-night. Do you know why? Because you love me. Something so strange has happened." And then she poured forth a story that Starwood could scarcely credit, in his amazement and delight.

"It is like a dream!" he stammered. "The other two will be happy together, and I can have you! Am I really awake? Doctor Leslie is willing, and it is all arranged?"

"Doctor Leslie has gone over to see Laura, and talk with Mrs. Creigh—I sent him off across the fields as soon as Robbie told me you had come. And Laura thinks it would be nice to have the two marriages at once. What do you think, Star?"

Mr. Burley's answer, though silent, was decidedly in the affirmative.

Madeline Bridges.

GET two words out of "enough" meaning "not enough." Answer: One hug.

CUSTOMER: "Waiter, this bullock's heart is very badly cooked." Waiter: "Well, sir, the fact is, the cook's been crossed in love, and whenever he has anything to do with a heart it so upsets him that he doesn't know what he's a-doin' of!"

WISEMAN looks at his watch with concern. "I can't understand," he says to his wife, "what has happened to my watch? I think it must want cleaning." "No, papa," chimes in little Fanny; "I am quite sure it is clean, because baby and I have washed it in the basin."

FIRST SERVANT: "I'm going to leave." Second Servant: "What's the matter?" "My mistress don't keep a cat." "What has her not keeping a cat got to do with you?" "Lots. When there is any cream missing there is no cat to lay the blame on, and I do love cream so."

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The Opportunity of Claude Harrington.

Telling of a Mean Trick and its Atonement.

Miss Durward stood on a rock which ran out into the sea, watching the waves which splashed against its slippery sides and which wetted her white canvas shoes with their spray. It was a blazing hot August day and scarcely a breath of wind ruffled her dark, curly hair, which was without any covering, in spite of the dangers of sunstroke. Her big frilled hat lay further away on the shore where she had been sitting. Her scarlet linen dress made her a conspicuous figure to anyone coming in that direction, and a tall man who came round the corner of the cliff which shut off her retreat from the rest of the world stopped for a moment to take in the picture. Then he made his way rapidly over the rocks to her side. So quietly did he come that it was not until he stood beside her and said: "Good morning, Miss Durward," that the girl realised his presence. She turned so suddenly that she almost lost her balance and nearly fell into the water at her feet.

"You!" she ejaculated in a tone of mingled astonishment and annoyance.

"Myself and no less; you seem surprised," he responded coolly.

"When did you come?" she asked, ignoring his remark.

"Last night by the mail train," he returned.

"And may I ask why? I thought you were in London and too busy to get away?"

"Well—I came because you are here."

"If that is the only reason you might have stayed away," retorted the girl crossly.

"As it happens, that is the sole and only reason; but I suppose you have not the only right and privilege of spending the summer in this retreat, have you, even though you may be allowed to be as rude as you like?"

"I am not rude, and if I were I have every excuse for it. I came here to be quiet and not to be worried, and it seems that is to be made impossible. However, I will leave you to yourself."

She turned round so sharply on the narrow ledge of slippery rock that she lost her balance, swayed for a moment, and then fell with a resounding splash into the deep water.

An expression of unalloyed joy overspread the countenance of the young man.

"And she can't swim," he muttered gleefully, then as he saw the dark head emerging from the sea, he pulled off his coat and jumped in after her.

The sudden shock of immersion in cold water had completely deprived Miss Durward of speech or hearing and she was quite at his mercy. For all her dignity she was really very small and slight, and her rescuer found no difficulty in swimming a little distance with his burden. Opposite to where she had been standing before her fall a large rock just showed its head out of the water which completely surrounded it. On this rock he placed the girl, and then, saying in a cheerful reassuring tone:

"Hold on tight, or you'll fall in again," he returned to his former resting-place, and sitting down, awaited events.

With an effort Miss Durward opened her eyes and looked about her in a dazed manner. Then the truth came to her with a flash, and rage got the upper hand. She carefully removed one hand from the slippery rock and brushed away the dark hair which fell into her eyes, and glared wrathfully at the impenitent and dripping young man who sat opposite to her, endeavouring to light a cigarette with a damp match.

She might almost as well have been in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean instead of only a few yards from the shore, so utterly impossible was it for her to reach land without getting far out of her depth, when she would again be ignominiously fished out by the man whom at that moment she hated with deadly and vicious hatred.

"I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself playing such childish tricks," she said angrily. "I insist upon your taking me off this rock at once—*at once*," she repeated with an attempt to be dignified which under the circumstances was a dismal failure.

"No," said Claude Harrington calmly. "Not yet. Not until I have said all I want to say, which you have never ye allowed me to do—now that I have a chance I am going to make the most of it—also you are going to make a promise before you get on shore again. In fact, on second thoughts, if you will make the promise first, I will land you and talk afterwards."

"I don't want to hear anything that you have to say and I will not listen to it."

"But, fortunately for me, for once in your life, you have no choice in the matter. Now *are* you going to promise?"

"How can I promise anything unless I know what it is."

"You will know if you have a little patience. You are to say 'Claude, I love you, and I will marry you one month from to-day.'"

"I shall do nothing of the sort!" she retorted angrily. "I hate you, and I will never speak to you again."

A wave larger than the rest rolled up and almost swept over her seat. She clutched the rock with both hands.

"Pity you didn't learn to swim, isn't it?" Mr. Harrington remarked. "After all the lessons you have had, too. However, as it happens, it is rather fortunate for me that you were not successful in your efforts."

The girl made no reply and he continued placidly:

"You see, you made a little mistake for once in your life.

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You thought I was just like all the rest of your train—to be played with as long as it amused you and then dropped when you were tired of me and wanted a fresh amusement. Having kept me dangling at your heels all the season you thought you had settled the whole affair when you came to Devonshire just as I was beginning to get restive; but you overlooked the fact that two people can sometimes play at the same game. So I followed you, and here I am, and here I mean to remain, and Fate appears to be on my side," with a grin at the forlorn object facing him.

"You are a brute and I hate you—*hate you*," remarked Miss Durward viciously.

He smiled.

"Hate away," he said. "But you will find it more satisfactory to change it to the other thing as I told you if you want to get back in time for lunch. It is getting late."

"I will never, never say anything of the sort, if I have to stay here all day."

"Well, of course, if you prefer to remain there, you are quite welcome to do so. I don't in the least mind sitting here. I had breakfast very late, and fortunately my cigarette case is water-tight and well filled."

"I thought you were a gentleman, anyhow. I wonder you like to make such a fool of yourself with all these people about."

"There are no people about and *I* am not making a fool of myself in the least," returned Mr. Harrington cheerfully.

Uncomfortably conscious of the fact that it was she herself who was most likely to attract the attention of any passers-by, Miss Durward took refuge in dignified silence.

A long silence ensued during which her tormentor smoked two cigarettes while his victim sat motionless.

"Well," he said at last, as he flung away the end of the second. "This is getting monotonous. I suppose I had better come across and talk to you."

He slipped off into the water again and came over to her. Holding on to the rock with one hand he looked up into the grey eyes above him, in which in spite of her valiant efforts to keep up appearances there was a suspicious moisture; as they met his blue ones they suddenly dropped and a faint pink flush crept up to the roots of Miss Durward's dark, curly hair which was rapidly recovering from its bath.

"Say it," said Mr. Harrington softly. "And you shall get off at once."

Before she could answer their solitude was invaded by a party of people who came suddenly round the cliff. The girl uttered an exclamation of dismay, and said hurriedly:

"Oh, here are a whole lot of people—do, do, *do*, please, get me off this hateful thing before they see me—whatever will they think?"

"Say what I want you to then," he repeated obstinately.

She looked at the determined face—and yielded—anything to get away from her ignominious position.

"You are very, very unkind to take advantage of me like this," Miss Durward said slowly. "But since you are determined I suppose I must do it—to save myself from ridicule"—she hesitated, and then said with a rush, the crimson mounting again to her face, "I love you."

"And you will promise to marry me one month from to-day?"

"And I will promise to marry you one month from to-day—anything, only get me out of this, quick," she said with a return of her own dictatorial manner.

Harrington said no more but took her in his arms and conveyed her the short distance which separated them from the rocks on the shore. Without a word or a backward glance at him she fled along the beach and round the cliff.

He placed the girl on an isolated rock, and proceeded to propose to her.

Late in the afternoon, after a prolonged search he found her on the beach. She was clothed from head to foot in spotless white and presented a very different appearance from the forlorn maiden in the limp linen dress of the morning. She saw him coming and deliberately lowered her parasol, and turned her back, reading with great absorption. Mr. Harrington walked quietly round to the other side of the barrier she had raised and flung himself on the sand beside her. Miss Durward took no notice. Apparently young men had no place in her world at all at that moment. He endured it for a few moments and then as she continued to read, he quietly took the book out of her hand and threw it along the beach.

"Cecile," he said softly. "Are you very angry with me? I want you to say again what you did this morning."

"Isn't once enough to humiliate me?" she asked without raising her eyes.

"I had to do it, dear, because you would not give me a chance to say what you knew I wanted to; but I am sorry I teased you, and I want you to say you forgive me and tell me over again, only of your own free will this time, what you did this morning. You know you meant to say it all the time only you were so proud and wilful you would not give in? Isn't that right?" he asked eagerly.

Miss Durward's eyes wandered slowly round the horizon, away to the cliffs in the distance, down to the little waves at her feet, and finally with an effort to the face of the man beside her. Then her mouth curved and a smile broke all over her small mutinous face.

"But it was a mean trick all the same," she said.

B. M. Study.

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Powerful Thrilling Series.

THE "BRIDGE" OF RUIN.

Being the

CONFESSIONS OF A GIRL GAMBLER.

Dramatis Personæ.

Olive Beresford, the writer of these confessions. She is a young lady who is lured into gambling by her friend, Annabel Vernon, whom she detects cheating. Miss Beresford arranges a secret code of signals with a Mr. Taskot, in order to beat Annabel Vernon at her own game.

Harry Vernon, of Vernon Towers, who with his wife plans to catch Olive in a trap. He manages to secure photographs of the incriminating gestures passed between Mr. Taskot and the relater of these episodes.

Annabel Vernon, wife of the last-named. An old school friend of Miss Beresford. Her husband having obtained the proofs of Olive's alleged cheating, she holds the photos over her victim as a threat, declaring that, unless Miss Beresford does as she is ordered, she will be denounced as a card-sharper. She makes the unfortunate girl a tool to win money from her guests.

Mr. Taskot, who poses as a gentleman of means, but who is really a despicable bounder. He endeavours to force Miss Beresford to marry him.

Mr. Maurice Ray, a gentleman who rescues the narrator from a mad dog, and who since takes a kindly interest in the welfare of the young girl, treating her with great respect, and showing her much consideration.

Mr. Dean Fisher, a "Bridge" expert, and one of the guests of the Vernons at Vernon Towers when Olive Beresford was fleeced.

Mrs. Grainger, a rich widow and an ardent gambler, another of the guests at the Towers.

Mr. Harold Bainbrig, a wealthy bachelor, who with his sister,

Miss Edith Bainbrig, loses heavily at "Bridge" whilst playing with the Vernons and the unwilling Olive Beresford.

EPISODE EIGHTEEN.

Compromising Circumstances.

Some girls faint on the slightest provocation. Others sometimes find it convenient to feign unconsciousness at awkward moments. I belong to neither category. But I was not proof against the latest misfortune which had overtaken me. I remember making a wild attempt to rise to my feet, but a deadly sickness overcame me, and I sank back in the carriage absolutely helpless, and oblivious of my surroundings.

When next I came to my senses I was in the waiting-room at the little station whence I intended travelling homewards, and the stationmaster's wife was holding a bottle of smelling-salts to my nose. The pungent odour proved violent enough to effect its intended purpose, and I opened my eyes to see a comely face looking into mine with great concern.

"There now, dearie, that's better! I'm glad you are coming round again. You gave your husband a dreadful scare."

At these words, spoken in good faith by my kindly nurse, I awoke to the full seriousness of my position, and exclaimed passionately: "My husband! How dare he try to make anyone think he is my husband? I never want to see the man again as long as I live!"

"Well, miss, I'm sorry I made a mistake. But the gentleman has really been very kind, and he is dreadfully anxious about you."

"He has brought me nothing but sorrow, and I hope he will never cross my path again."

The woman saw it was no use arguing with me in the frame of mind I was then in, so she turned the subject, and asked me if I would have a cup of tea.

"I'll have it ready in a moment," she added. "And I'm sure it will do you good."

"Thank you," I answered. "You are very kind, and I shall be glad of the tea, for I——"

I was about to add that I had eaten no breakfast, but wisely refrained, and asked instead:

"Can you tell me when the next train to Idlebury Junction leaves here?"

"Not for an hour yet, miss, so you have plenty of time to come to my house, and tidy yourself up a bit before you go."

Thankfully availing myself of the invitation thus given me, I followed my new friend into her pretty little home, which adjoined the station, and rested in an arm-chair while she hastily prepared some tea for me. She also added some nice bread-and-butter and a boiled egg, and I felt very much better afterwards. Then I straightened my hair and made myself otherwise presentable, all the time wondering what had become of Mr. Taskot, and feeling relieved because he had had the sense to go away without obtruding his unwelcome presence upon me again.

By-and-bye I was ready for departure, and after thanking Mrs. Gorton for her kind attentions, I bethought me to take my purse out of my chatelaine bag, and pay for the services which I had no right to accept from a stranger without payment. But what was my dismay to discover that the purse only contained a few coppers! I knew I had not much. But surely I could not be mistaken in thinking that I had had more than sufficient money to go home with! Trouble could not have deprived me so entirely of my wits as to make me forget how much money I had!

Mrs. Gorton noticed the look of dismay with which I discovered my practically penniless condition, for she immediately observed:

"I hope there's nothing wrong about your money, miss? If there is, all I can say is that nobody here has touched it."

"Oh, I don't imagine anything of the sort," was my hasty answer. "But I seem to be terribly out in my reckoning. And how am I to get home with no money to buy my railway ticket with?"

"Oh, that's all right, miss. The gentleman, Mr. Kastock, or some such name, gave me some money, 'to pay for my trouble,' he said. Not that I wouldn't have done the best for a fainting lady, in any case, but he just pressed it on me. He had to go away somewhere. But in case you came round before long, he left a first-class ticket ready for you, so there is nothing to stop you from taking the next train, even if Mr. Kaspot doesn't get back before then."

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Now here was a dreadful dilemma! It was, of course, impossible for me to remain in a neighbourhood where I had been tricked out of the respect of everybody who knew me, especially as I was in a penniless condition. My only course was to get home as quickly as possible. But to do that, I should have to accept another favour from the man whose attentions had brought nothing but trouble to me so far, and the evident necessity of this step was so humiliating that I was desperately sorry for myself.

But of the choice of evils which I turned over in my mind this seemed the only one that would solve my present difficulties, so I forced myself to accept the ticket, and took my seat with a very sad heart when the train came in, my only crumb of comfort being the absence of Mr. Taskot.

Very bitter were my thoughts as I was being whirled towards Idlebury Junction, and it hardly seemed possible that but a few days had passed since I, a happy and light-hearted girl, had started on the visit which had proved so disastrously eventful.

"I must try and bury the memory of what has happened," I told myself. "So long as I remain in my own village I am not likely to meet any of the people who live near Vernon Towers. As for Mr. Ray—well, I must not think of him again."

Nevertheless, my thoughts were full of him. And when I changed trains at Idlebury Junction, I could not help regretting that Mr. Taskot's shameful behaviour to me would prevent Mr. Ray from ever again brightening my life with his aid and advice. I was not used to travelling alone, and I should have been glad of friendly help in seeing to the transference of my luggage from one train to the other. But I managed to dispose of it into the hands of a porter, and was settling down for the conclusion of my journey, when I received a disagreeable surprise.

Just as the train was starting, the carriage door was hastily opened, and another passenger jumped in. It was Mr. Taskot, and I knew in an instant that he was there of deliberate intention to persecute me! I rose from my seat, although the train was already in motion, and would have jumped out, if my fellow-passenger had not forcibly held the door fast.

"Miss Beresford," he exclaimed, "are you mad? To jump out now would kill you!"

"Better be killed," was my fierce rejoinder, "than to suffer your ill-omened proximity."

"I am sorry my presence is obnoxious to you, for it is really due to my desire to be of service."

"It is but an ill service that robs me of the esteem of respectable people."

"Look here now, Miss Beresford, I'm awfully in love with you, and when a fellow is in love, he'll do anything to win the woman he wants."

"A *fellow* might. But a *gentleman* wouldn't!"

"By Jove, that's good! I say, you do know how to rub it in! That's where you score over other girls. The rest are all so brainless—and so——"

"Excuse me, sir, but flattery from you is no compliment. Will you kindly confine yourself to matters of fact? And perhaps you will tell me why you are in this train? I thought I had seen the last of you."

"H'm! That's what it is not to be an artist, introduced under romantic circumstances! You wouldn't talk to Ray like that!"

"No, I wouldn't. Neither would he behave to me as you have done."

"Yet he turned his back on you when things looked a bit shady. And it was I who stuck to you, and who provided for your return home! And I got into the train a station before you got in, just so as to leave you to yourself until you had quite recovered your composure. I watched over you all the way here, too. Yet I cannot earn a word of thanks from you, no matter what I do."

"You can easily earn a great many words of thanks from me."

"Tell me how, and I'll do it like a shot."

"Give me all those photographs which Harry Vernon took. And write to Mr. Ray, owning that I was unable to prevent you kissing me in the carriage."

Mr. Taskot's eyeglass, which usually seemed to grow over his right optic, behaved just as it always did whenever he was astonished. It fell out of its place, and dangled for a few seconds on its chain, unheeded by its owner.

"Well, really," said the latter, "that's the coolest demand I ever heard!"

I had all this time remained standing. But as the train was now a long way from a station, I sat down again and looked my tormentor squarely in the face.

"Do you agree to my request?" I asked.

"By Jove, no!" was the answer. "At least, not unless you marry me!"

"That I will never do."

"Well, you are excited just now. We'll let the matter stand over till you have time to consider all the *pros* and *cons*."

"There are no *pros*."

"Pardon me—I can give you a strong one. By marrying me, you will make handsome provision for your own future, and will silence for ever any scandal that has arisen in respect of a—a—cardplaying. And of a—a—the fact that you and I have journeyed down here in the same train and at my expense."

Ah! now I knew why this man had forced himself into my company! He meant to make it so impossible for me to justify my conduct that I should be driven in sheer self-defence to accept him as my companion for life! The hopelessness of my position almost crushed me. But it did not crush me enough to make me yield my life and freedom to him, and I passionately reiterated my refusal to have anything more to do with him.

"Very well," he said, speaking so coolly that my heart misgave me, for the man seemed so horribly confident of ultimate victory. "Very well, Miss Beresford, I will not argue the matter any further just now. I will change into another carriage at the next stopping place. But mind you—I am not a man who ever relinquishes his purpose, and you may rest assured that you will hear from me again."

EPISODE NINETEEN.

"No Escape."

"I REALLY can't make out what's happened to you while you were away. You leave here to pay a country visit in the best of spirits, and you come back miserable and half dead. Worse still, you seem to be fretting all the time about something. Upon my word, Olive, your holiday hasn't done you much good!"

Mrs. Windsor, the friend with whom I had gone to live after my aunt's death, had more than once expressed herself as above, and I realised at last that if I would avoid inconvenient curiosity, I must throw off the depression which had possessed me during the fortnight that had elapsed since my return home.

So I answered with comparative cheerfulness:

"My dear Mrs. Windsor, I'm afraid you are worrying about me, and I'm sure there's not the slightest need. Vernon Towers disagreed with me, it is true. And I was disappointed to find that my old schoolmate and her husband were the reverse of nice. But I've nothing to fret about, and now that I have shaken off the effects of the chill I got while I was away I shall be jollier than ever."

Mrs. Windsor looked dubiously at me. But I appeared to be as good as my word, and was, outwardly at least, just as I had been before my memorable visit to Vernon Towers. Yet I lived in continual fear of being unpleasantly reminded of my card-playing adventures. And, worse still, I could not banish Maurice Ray from my mind. He was my ideal of all that was manly and noble, and I knew that the woman whom he might marry would be the woman whom I should envy all my life. For, little though I had seen of him, I had learnt to love him, and it was small wonder that my heart ached with grief at the conviction that he could never feel anything but contempt for me.

There was also another source of worry for me. I owed

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Mr. Taskot the price of my railway ticket. But, until my next quarter's income was due I could not count upon receiving any money, and I was thankful that Mrs. Windsor would not expect anything from me until then. Meanwhile, it behoved me to practice rigid economy, and I trusted to be able to repay Mr. Taskot without having to come into personal touch with him again, by forwarding the money in an envelope addressed to a club of which I had been casually informed that he was a member.

"Olive, we have some friends coming to spend the evening with us, and we want you to be there too. We can wait for you, if you will get ready now, to drive back with us."

The speaker was Alice Cheshunt, the daughter of some people who had recently come to live within three miles of my home. We had met at the vicarage, and had speedily become very friendly. The Cheshunts were all exceedingly nice, and I gladly welcomed the opportunity of diverting my thoughts from the subjects which had engrossed them lately.

So it came to pass that I was soon bowling along the country lanes with Mrs. Cheshunt and Alice. They made very kindly inquiries about how I had enjoyed my recent little holiday. But though I was careful not to hint at anything unpleasant, I was not enthusiastic enough to encourage much questioning, and I was very glad when the bustle of preparing for the guests who were presently expected put the subject out of their minds.

It had been arranged that I was to stay all night, so there was no need for me to follow the example of several people who had perforce to leave while the pleasure of the evening was still in full swing. For it *was* a pleasant evening, up to a certain point, with good music and witty conversation galore.

"I'm dying to have a game of Bridge. Can't you arrange one?"

The speaker was Mrs. Smedley, a lady who lived only a short distance away, and who was quite famous in the neighbourhood for her successful progressive whist parties. Her proposal was hailed with delight by several guests, and as my shining eyes proclaimed my willingness to join the players, I was forthwith pressed into service.

Of course, after what I had already endured through gambling, I ought to have steered clear of the temptation now set before me. But as I did not blame the cards or the game for what had happened, and as I was no longer in the company of people who wanted to fleece me, I saw no harm in consenting to make a fourth for "phantom stakes."

"My dear," said Mrs. Cheshunt, about an hour later, after hearing that I was a very lucky player, "I had no idea you knew anything about Bridge."

"I only learnt very recently," was my guarded reply as I turned to sort the cards just dealt to me. "Of course, one can soon pick up a game that is attractive."

"Just so," said a voice at my elbow. "The cleverest player I ever met was a lady who had only handled cards a few times before she won hundreds of pounds."

My heart almost stood still at these words. For they were spoken by a person whose very presence was of sinister omen for me, and I knew that they contained a veiled threat. I was not aware that the Cheshunts knew Mr. Taskot. Yet here he was, and I could but remember what he had said when last I saw him—"Mind you, I am not a man who ever relinquishes his purpose, and you may rest assured that you will hear from me again."

What should I do? Should I try to avoid too much attention by treating this man with the same civility that I would bestow upon any other chance acquaintance? Or should I mark my sense of his shortcomings by declining to speak to him?

I decided that the former would be the wiser course, and, schooling myself to appear thoroughly at ease, I turned my head towards the person who stood behind my chair.

"Mr. Taskot!" I ejaculated coolly. "I thought I recognised your voice. But I did not know you were expected here."

"Would the knowledge have prevented you from coming?" he asked in a low tone.

"You flatter yourself too much," I murmured, "if you think I regulate my movements by yours."

"Play!" exclaimed my partner, and, feeling cowed in spite of myself by the evil look in Mr. Taskot's unmonocled eye, I resumed the interrupted game. But my luck had deserted me, and I soon had reason to be thankful that my losses were only nominal, not real.

Mr. Taskot, it transpired, had come, on an open invitation, to visit Mr. and Mrs. Smedley, and, finding that they had come here, had not hesitated to join them, for he had already met the Cheshunts at their house. A presumably wealthy bachelor, of fair reputation, is never at a discount in Society, and Mr. Taskot proved no exception to the general rule, for he was welcomed as cordially as if he had been expected.

"A revoke!" called one of my opponents. "We shall exact penalty."

"Certainly," I agreed. "And my partner must forgive me. I suppose I am tired, or I would not have revoked, so I think I would like to cease playing after this hand."

The others had evidently played as long as they wanted, for there was a general break-up of the game, and those who did not need to hurry home settled down for a final chat before leaving.

"It is very good of you to allow me the pleasure of joining you," said Mr. Taskot to Mrs. Cheshunt.

"Not at all," was the pleasant disclaimer. "We are only too pleased to see you. But how odd that you and Olive should have met before!"

"I see nothing odd in it, if you will allow me to say so. Miss Beresford and I recently visited the same country house together, and I have such happy recollections of the delightful hours spent in her company that I ought to be forgiven for any apparent presumption I have shown this evening."

At this speech, which was instantly interpreted just as the speaker intended it to be interpreted, I felt myself flush scarlet with anger, and I was about to utter a scathing rejoinder when I saw Mr. Taskot take a packet of papers out of his pocket and proceed to arrange them in sequence. I knew only too well what they were. They were the fatal photographs which would convict me of cheating at cards, and horror at the idea of their being shown to my friends sealed my lips.

"What do you say, Olive?" smiled my tormentor. "Shall I show these little snapshots, and give their history now? Or shall I wait until after the—a—the little ceremony we talked of?"

"Oh, not now!" I gasped. "Not now!"

"As you will, dearest! Of course, your word is henceforth always law to me."

I heard Mr. Taskot address me thus, with unwarrantable familiarity, but I was for the moment incapable of any feeling but relief at my narrow escape from exposure, and it was not until I began to be overwhelmed with congratulations that I comprehended what had happened.

The photographs were believed to be the innocent evidence of a pretty little romance, and my answer to Mr. Taskot had been taken as a tacit acknowledgment of an engagement between us!

Of a truth I was now hopelessly in the toils, for even marriage with the man I detested was preferable to permanent disgrace.

(To be concluded shortly.)

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Rodney Ray's Revenge.

How a Woman's Refusal Wrecked a Man's Life.

THE scene was grand, the night was perfect. Scarcely a breeze stirred the air or dallied with the waves. The moon was full. The sky was cloudless. The temperature was such as left one no thought of there being either heat or cold in existence.

Far out to sea there was a long low line of smoke, that and a shadowy shape which one could call an ocean steamer—or a dream of one. Further still, down on the horizon's very edge there was a tiny speck of white that one might guess was a sail, or believe was the wing of some seabird, as one pleased.

Half a mile away, down the long level beach, there was a group of merry children enjoying as much of the early evening as was to belong to them, and with all the greater earnestness and zest because it was almost over, and there was to be a whole long night between them and the happy morrow. Under the blaze of the electric light they dug in the sand, they ran races, they rushed down to meet the incoming waves, and dashed back even faster. They did all the childish and pleasant things which free and happy hearts could prompt them to do—many things which we older ones (with nerves) blame and scold them for—many things which those of us who are blessed with good health secretly envy them the doing.

Further away there were music and dancing.

And the breath of the bounding sea stirred about the loitering man and woman, far from human companionship, other than their own, upon the lonely beach. The loveliness and mysteriousness of the night lay all about them and in their hearts. The distant steamer and almost invisible sail made the night more lonely; the voices of the children came faintly to them with the wash of the waves; everything seemed almost as unreal as the figures in a dream, and the throb of the music might have been from another and an unseen world. Indeed it might! Blended with the sea's voice, and the laugh of childhood, it was almost divine.

Rodney Ray thought that it was Paradise.

We will go up the beach. The man and the woman are walking there, you remember.

Rodney Ray has told his story. He has asked his question. He has known, and so has the woman—and for a long time, too—that it would be told some time.

I doubt if he went out with her to-night intending to tell her of his love. He has loved her long—he has loved her earnestly; let no one doubt that. But love must learn patience—it must wait.

Rodney Ray was scarcely a handsome man. He was a bit too stout to be graceful, and his face had more strength in it than beauty ever allows a man. His eyes were grey, and clear, and bright. His mouth spoke of will and determination. The poise of his head denoted pride. He was evidently an earnest man and a truthful one.

The woman was a vision of loveliness. Tall, dark, full of grace, faultless under the glare of the electric light, in the heated ballroom; perfect in form and complexion by honest daylight. By moonlight one would have felt justified in any flattering words. I believe that Rodney Ray had just called her an angel.

Suddenly he said, "Stella, darling, I love you dearly. Do you love me? Will you be my wife?"

Her answer was a terrible blow to him.

She looked him straight in the eyes and told him "No."

His head went down upon his breast. It was the only sign of his intense suffering. It was as though all life and hope and energy had suddenly been crushed out of him.

The woman tapped her dainty foot impatiently upon the sands. She stole a hurried, frightened glance at him—a glance he did not see. She loved power; she loved the power which she had over this man; but there was a doubt in her girlish heart as to whether she had been wise in attempting to use it.

She was not the first woman who had played with a man's heart and wrecked her own life by doing it.

"You've led me to this," he said brokenly, "and if you had no other answer than this for me, you had no right to do it."

He raised his head and looked at her. But she was looking at the sand now.

She made no answer.

"It was wicked."

She raised her head.

"It was cowardly to deliberately wreck a man's life as you have done, Miss Atherton."

Stella Atherton thought two things; first, that her lover didn't understand women, and second, that she was very, very angry.

We will agree that Rodney Ray did not understand women; we will agree that what he had said was quite enough to have angered Miss Atherton.

But, in this age, when a man does not understand a woman, she is a fortunate one who wins him.

For the rest, an angry woman will ride rough-shod over her own heart that she may hurt the one who has angered her. And she will but go the quicker and more bravely, the closer his words have been to the truth.

"Pardon me, Mr. Ray," she said icily; "but I could scarcely have guessed you intended marriage. Your profession, or calling, or business——"

"Don't!" he cried, sharply, turning away his head.

She paused.

He looked off to the ocean, and let the cool air touch his face. He wondered vaguely whether she had touched upon the truth in what she had started to say. He felt that he had frittered away too much of his life. Bohemian in all his tastes and habits, he wondered whether it were really that which had cost him the coveted happiness of his life. He could write—a little; he could paint—a little; he was a musician—in a sense

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Poor, as the world goes, he had not come to look upon the use of his powers in the gaining of wealth as a duty to himself, to the world, and to the power who had endowed him with a grand intellect.

Had it cost him his future? He could not tell. It looked so.

He groaned aloud. He never thought of asking the woman to reconsider her answer, though she was almost praying he would.

"How stupid he was!" she said to herself, forgetting that it would have been no compliment to her to have guessed she was a coquette.

She grew angrier with him. She threw the fact of her fortune in his teeth.

"Perhaps you thought I had enough for both?" she said pointedly.

He looked at her and his face darkened, but he made no answer.

"You blamed me for leading you on," she said, with slow deliberation. "Perhaps you will admit that all is fair with a man who is a mere fortune-hunter."

He turned quickly and caught her by the arm. He meant no violence to her, and never knew that he had done her any.

But she carried the prints of his fingers on her delicate flesh—yes, and kissed them and cried over them—for many a day.

His eyes blazed down into hers.

"I would kill a man who said that to me. Your sex saves you. You know that I am not what you have called me. You know that, Stella Atherton."

He looked away again. The sea was only an unquiet and relentless monster to his eyes now.

Low-lying clouds betokened storm. The childish laughter was gone from the sands. The distant music was only a discordant clang.

The scene was what it had been. The man had changed.

There are those among modern theologians who believe that the soul itself will make its own heaven or hell. Perhaps they are right.

"You have been cruel and heartless," he said, the agony of thorough conviction of the truth of what he said trembling in his tones, "and the knowledge that it is so will help me to outlive it."

She merely bowed her head, as though in approval.

"But the time shall come when you shall regret this night. And when it comes you shall find it has no end. The sorrow you find then shall be yours in life and in death, and only your grave shall shut it away from you."

She bowed again.

He turned away and left her there alone. He walked away with long strides, while she stood and watched him, and the dimness of her vision was not from spray nor mist from the sea.

Regret! Yes, from this moment, for ever!

And he never guessed it.

One word. One little cry from her. One pause in his rapid, reckless walk. Any of these, and I might lay down my pen and write "The End" over against their story.

But she stood like a frozen form.

And he never looked back.

It's the way of the world, alas! It's the way of the world!

It took Stella Atherton a full month to learn that Rodney Ray was really gone—gone without another word with her—gone without a message of farewell. I won't begin to tell you the time and money she spent in finding where he had gone. It took both, and she gave them freely. It meant much to her when she learnt that he had buried himself in the wilds of America and was hunting for gold.

She fought with her other self such fierce battles as our two selves can fight; her love and her tenderness, and her sense of justice against her pride and her anger.

Could she have seen him, had she even had his picture, I believe she would have won. As it was, she lost. She wrote one letter to him, and destroyed it because it was too short; she burnt another because it was too long; this one was too cold; that one was too tender.

It ended by her letting silence fall between them.

Other suitors came—all sorts and conditions of men.

One was persistent. No matter that he was old, and that this woman loved youth; no matter that he had money, and that she despised it because she had been so foolish as to pile it up as a barrier between her and the truest heart she had ever known; no matter that she told him "No!"

He was honest and kindly. He was thoroughly in earnest. He asked again and again. He won, as other men have done, a weary woman's promise, without love or heart in it.

But how was the exile in the mountains, reading of her marriage, to know that?

It was a hard life that to which Rodney Ray had condemned himself. He rose early and retired late.

He spared himself in no way. He worked in all weathers—he grew rich. He had gold stored away in more than one place among the hills.

He would smile quietly to himself as he thought of it all, although he sometimes wondered what the use of it would be, since he had failed to win Stella Atherton. Then again he would have a feverish desire to have as large a fortune as hers, and would hurry away to his work.

One year there was the news that the woman he had loved was the wife of another! What matter? She was no more dead to him than she had been when he walked away from her that night by the sea, with the glare of the moonlight all about him, and the hateful blare of the dance-music in his ears.

The next year she was a mother. A son had come to her—a boy who would grow up with the face of another man.

I think this hurt him more than her marriage had done.

It was much like the sensation one in a trance would have when the sods began to rattle down upon his coffin.

The third year death came near her. The man who had given her his name and his fortune went down through the silent gates, and left her only fortune and name.

Did she love him? Would she weep over him?

Rodney Ray could not guess. He would never know.

No matter for that. She was nothing to him—less than nothing.

The next year she went to America. A vain man would have at least wondered! Rodney Ray did not. She came, with money and furniture, and comforts and luxuries, and settled down in the village where he lived. Perhaps to trouble and annoy him, was his first thought—a thought which he put away from him as unworthy and unjust, and which he did not follow with another that was any more to the purpose. He said to himself that he had conquered his passion; he said that his wound was healed. He gave his words the lie by avoiding the newcomer. He moved further up into the hills and never saw her.

Perhaps she had done all that a woman could well do. Perhaps she would have done more. I cannot tell. The end has left it all unknown.

The snow lay deep in the valleys. There was an icy wind from the mountains. More snow was falling. The sun was set. The brief twilight was almost gone.

"Rodney," said a rich, womanly voice.

Rodney Ray might have wondered why his name had been given to the boy. Or he might not have wondered. I cannot say. There are men who will take a woman at her word, I suppose, and hold to it all their lives long.

"Rodney."

There was no answer.

"Rodney."

Her voice was louder and full of anxiety.

Still no answer.

A hurried search everywhere. No boy to be found. Then the mother hurried out to follow the tracks of the little wanderer through the snow. Only three years old, and he had not been gone a half hour. Surely she must find him.

She ran through the blinding storm, finding his tracks as far as the little foot bridge across the mountain torrent. Further than that, nothing certain. No footprints; no

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trace. Perhaps, in God's mercy, because the snow had covered them. Perhaps——

"Perhaps, in God's mercy, because the snow had covered them," she said to a neighbour when she reached the village again.

And the rough old man drew his hand across his eyes, repeated "in God's mercy" in a doubtful way, looked at the hills and shuddered.

She did not understand him then. There was certainly a mercy in that.

* * * * * *

It was late. It was so late that Rodney Ray was hurrying home, and beginning to look and feel anxious. There was a sound here and there in the forest that reminded him of the music across the sandy stretch of beach the night he went home from Stella Atherton, though why such a horrible suggestion should have come to him I can scarcely tell. Men listen as they feel, I suppose.

He reached his door at last, to find what? A line of tiny footsteps leading past it!

He shut his lips together tighter, increased his speed, and followed the baby's trail.

He found the child a half-mile away.

"What's your name?" he asked, as he caught him up in his arms, and rapidly turned to retrace his steps.

"Rodney," said the little fellow, looking up at him with eyes like Stella Atherton's.

Rodney Ray stooped over with a sudden impulse and kissed the boy.

The strong man shuddered.

"Oh, Heaven, give me help!" he said under his breath, as a wolf, cowardly because it was alone, slunk away.

Five minutes later it was evident that they could not reach Rodney Ray's house. There was a steep rock near the path, up which he climbed, carrying the boy with him. By dislodging a large fragment he made it impossible for either animals or men to follow them unless they had ladders.

The snow fell, the wind blew, the cold increased. And for hours the boy talked and laughed, to fall eventually into the sleep of exhausted childhood, protected from the cold by the clothes of the man who had found and saved him.

* * * * * *

They found them so in the morning. The wolves had gone home to their dens from their night-long riot of vain endeavour. The child looked up and smiled. He had lain with the coat and vest of Rodney Ray wrapped closely about him.

Rodney Ray smiled. But it was the smile that never changes—the smile that we always remember best because it comes last. In it was a prayer to the Heaven he had found. In it was thankfulness to the God who had given him the honour of martyrdom. No more sorrow, no more pain, no more care.

He had his revenge!

He gave his life for it!

Clarence Bontelle.

"THE PAPER A BOY CAN TAKE HOME."

The Third Number of . . .

. . THE . .

BOYS' LEADER

Pearson's New Paper.

NOW ON SALE. ONE PENNY.

"Funny Pips" is a separate paper Given Away each week with "The Boys' Leader."

Your Editor Chats.

Last week I mentioned to you that a series of stories very much to your liking would soon begin in this paper. "The Bridge of Ruin" has been immensely popular, as it thoroughly deserves to be, but all good things must have an end, and these episodes will soon be brought to a thrilling conclusion. I have no doubt that your sorrow in saying "Adieu" to Miss Olive Beresford will be forgotten in your pleasure at making the acquaintance of your new heroine, whom, I may say, is a brave girl who risks much danger for the sake of her absent lover. Her exciting escapades at the hands of relentless people, her stubborn courage, and her undaunted love will bring forth your ardent admiration, and I am sure that all my readers will thank me for inducing her to relate her experiences. But more of this later.

RESULT OF BURIED STATIONS COMPETITION.

The task of checking the attempts of this competition has been necessarily a long one on account of the extreme care which had to be exercised. A large staff of checkers was busily engaged, and their work is now completed. Most of the attempts contained a large number of words which, under the conditions of the competition, were inadmissible. After these had been eliminated from the attempts it was discovered that the greatest number of correct words was sent in by

Miss A. P. Sargent, Draycott, near Cheddar, Somerset, who is therefore the winner of the £50. This attempt contained 688 words in all, 520 of which were admissible.

The winner of the £25 is H. A. Upward, "Edfon," Romford, Essex, whose attempt contained 713 words, 517 of which were admissible.

The winner of the £10 is Alex. Smith, Oakamoor, Stoke-on-Trent. His attempt consisted of a total of 725 words, 513 of which were admissible.

The Twenty-Five Gramophones have been awarded to the following competitors, whose attempts come next in order of correctness.

D. Boardley, Mint Street, Kendal; S. Hill, 61 Kendal Road, Sparkbrook, Birmingham; A. E. Roby, 27 Victoria Road, Stoke Newington, N.; H. Barnes, 2 Vauxhall Walk, S.E.; P. A. Foulds, 37 Ribblesdale Road, Bolton; E. Birkenhead, 3 College Villas, Grays; F. Parker, Bruce Cottage, Sinderby, Thirsk, Yorks; F. T. C. Wickett, 38 Victoria Road, Exmouth; F. Simkin, Edmondthorpe, near Oakham; A. F. Marshall, 11 Whellock Road, Chiswick, W.; Miss Lily Peddle, 10 Raeburn Street, Brixton, S.W.; M. Mackenzie, 46 Teulon Street, Walton, Liverpool; Rev. J. A. Beard, Melksham, Wilts; Geo. Laxton, 10 Raeburn Street, Brixton, S.W.; A. C. Ford, Station Road, Rainham, Kent; Mrs. Bell, 17 Castledine Road, Anerley, S.E.; W. Berry, 97 Gladstone Buildings, Willow Street, Finsbury; Jas. Cameron, Scotchman Lane, Morley, Leeds; H. Osborne, 90 Orlando Street, Bolton, Lancs; A. E. Oldham, 58 Westward Street, Middlesborough; B. R. Hill, 61 Kendal Road, Sparkbrook, Birmingham; F. White, 162 Camberwell New Road, S.E.; A. Backhouse, 15 Barton Street, Moss Side, Manchester; Mrs. Mackenzie, 46 Teulon Street, Walton, Liverpool; V. Cameron, 32 Scotchman Lane, Morley, Leeds.

Your Editor.

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REPAID BY LOVE.

A Very Pretty Little Tale of a Borrowed Sovereign.

The air was chill and wintry, and the short uncompromising afternoon was already deepening into night as Max Villiers crossed the great open space of Trafalgar Square and turned into the Strand. A cutting east wind met him as he did so, and he buttoned his great coat still more closely about him. A couple of poor, ill-clad, hungry-looking children passed him, and he dived into his trousers pocket for a stray sixpence. He knew it was there, for his cash balance had now dwindled far below the limits of arithmetical calculation. Finding it, therefore, with very little difficulty, he tendered it to the astonished urchins, and, mumbling something about "buns" and "cakes," hurried off as though the police were on his track.

"Poor little souls!" he muttered. "It's rough enough for a man, but it's worse for kids!"

He walked on a few paces, and a smile—half sad, half humorous—crossed his handsome, thoughtful face.

"Six from six-and-three leaves five-and-nine," he mused. "That's bad enough, but I must have some tea, which is worse. True, I've still got one 'gold-boy' here"—he touched the sovereign purse which dangled at his watch chain—"but that I am afraid I must regard as the property of Mrs. Jinks. Her eye was more evil than usual this morning, and her hints about 'gents as didn't pay their doos to lone widders' savoured strongly of the personal. So *that* cannot be regarded as an asset, and I must limit my understanding to the contemplation of the aforesaid five-and-nine. Heavens, what it is to be an author!"

He turned into an A.B.C. shop, and, taking a seat at one of the tables, ordered an exceedingly modest tea. Then, while he waited for its arrival, he resumed his meditations and gazed thoughtfully into vacancy.

There was something very striking about the strong, handsome, intellectual face, and a quiet, shy-looking girl, seated at an adjoining table, found herself attracted by it in spite of herself. But Max Villiers was wholly unconscious even of her presence, and went on with his reflections as before. Eight or nine months ago he had been well-known in some of the second-rate and one or two of the first-rate journals as a tolerably clever short-story writer, and there had been no lack of guineas to reward his labours. But one day he awoke to the hitherto undreamt of conviction that he was destined for bigger things. A great inspiration had come to him—and he knew that his time had come. So he had cast his old, casual, purposeless work into the pit of oblivion, and sat himself down to a new and nobler creation—the writing of a great novel. Almost before he was aware of it, the work had absorbed his every faculty. He forgot everything else—even his growing difficulties and pressing needs—and lived only in the world he was creating. Slowly the many intricacies of the masterful plot spun themselves out. Bold and vigorous treatment, flashes of merry humour, touches of deep-stirring pathos—all found a place in this masterpiece of fiction. And now the work was done. With feverish haste and a new light in his grey eyes, he had read it through to himself, and then, with the flush of victory on his face, he had carefully wrapped the manuscript in brown paper and deposited it with a firm of publishers in the Strand. That was a week ago, and he had heard nothing since.

But when he had drawn that last dramatic picture—when the world he had created shook off its fetters of sordid selfishness and soared upward to a new millennium—and when, over this brightly glowing picture, he had drawn the curtain and written the last forceful word, then he had awakened to that old world—the world of bitter remembrances, of pressing needs, and of stern realities—and he knew that he was poor. But, with a brave heart, he had set himself to mend the situation, and had managed, in spite of the mental exhaustion following his greater work, to write and dispatch a short story to one of the magazines. So he waited, and hoped, and dreamt of the future, though now keenly alive to the difficulties of the present, and the great warm heart of the man shone out of those deep grey eyes as he lingered lovingly over his recent work, and anticipated the success which was to follow it.

He was roused from his reverie by the sound of voices at the adjoining table. For the first time since he had entered, he became aware of the presence of the girl whose eyes had more than once been attracted to his face. She was in obvious embarrassment now, though Villiers was as yet ignorant of its cause, and a waitress was standing at her side. The girl was fumbling nervously in her pocket, and a very slender purse lay on the table before her. There was a look of unbelief on the face of the waitress, which the girl was not slow to notice. Her embarrassment increased each instant, and a look of utter hopelessness crept into her face as her search revealed nothing.

"I had a sovereign in my purse," she said feebly. "I can't think what has become of it. Oh, dear, I hope I haven't lost it, for I haven't enough change to pay you."

The waitress preserved an uncompromising silence, and the girl grew more and more nervous.

"Oh, what shall I do!" she said, almost crying.

"Perhaps you might leave something instead, until you can get the money," suggested the waitress. "If a lady forgets her money, she sometimes leaves her watch or ring, and sends for it later on."

The girl shook her head.

"I have neither," she said, and the waitress sniffed significantly.

Max Villiers looked searchingly at the girl, and his heart softened at the sight. Her face was very pale, and there were dark circles under the large blue eyes that seemed to tell of recent tears. There was an air of gentleness and refinement about the girl too, that contrasted ill with the evident poverty

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of her attire. She was unmistakably a lady—Max Villiers could see that—but——

"Poor little thing!" he said to himself, as he saw the blue troubled eyes slowly fill with tears. "It's rough on a man but a girl——It's too dreadful to think about. But what can I do? It wasn't so difficult with the kids, but a sovereign is different. And then there's Mrs. Jinks!" Again he looked at the poor, troubled face of the girl, and he ground his teeth.

"Confound Mrs. Jinks!" he muttered to himself. "But how *can* I do it? She wouldn't accept help from me, even if I offered it, or I know very little of the sex. And even if she would——" And he touched his sovereign purse again. "Phew, what a mess I should be in!"

Suddenly an idea flashed through his brain. There was a brief conflict within him, and the sad face of the girl before him gained the victory. Secretly extracting his last gold coin from its receptacle, he stooped suddenly, noisily jerking the table as he did so. A moment later he rose and extended his hand to the girl at the adjoining table. Between the finger and thumb was a sovereign.

"Is this what you lost?" he asked steadily. "It was on the floor."

A rich flush suffused the girl's face as she rose from her seat.

"Oh, thank you!" she said gratefully. "It must have dropped out of my purse."

Instantly the tears vanished from the blue eyes, and a sweet smile lit up the pale face, and Max felt himself well rewarded. A few moments later, and she was gone, and Max, again lightening his pocket by the sum of sixpence, went out into the Strand and turned down a side street in the direction of the Embankment.

"An expensive outing," he said comically as he mounted the narrow stairs to his attic.

Mrs. Jinks, hearing him enter, came out of her sitting-room to meet him.

"Two letters for you, sir," she said, and looked at him significantly. "I 'ope as 'ow it's good noos, sir, for your bills arunnin' up and I'm only a poor widder, sir, and money's shocking tight, and the butcher he do say——"

She stopped. Max Villiers had torn open one of the envelopes and the pink flush of a cheque caught her watchful eye. She hastened to apologise.

"I'm sure I means no offence, sir. You've always been a good lodger, and paid me reg'lar up to the last few weeks. I wouldn't trouble you now, sir, but a woman must live, and it comes 'ard when you're a widder and 'ave to work hard like me."

"I know, I know," said Max hastily. "I'm not offended. I'll just go out and change this, and then I'll settle up with you."

Mrs. Jinks retreated with a satisfied sigh, and Max, left to himself, tore open the second envelope. One glance, and the colour leapt to his face and his eye brightened.

"Ah," he said, "it's come at last! 'Messrs. Caxton and Wall present their compliments to Mr. Villiers, and request the favour of an early interview in order to arrange preliminaries regarding the publication of the novel now in their hands. Both the partners will be in to-morrow morning, if that will suit Mr. Villiers' convenience.' That looks very much like business. Very well, to-morrow morning be it. I must drive a good bargain, I suppose, though that is not much in my line. At any rate, I shall stick out for royalties, for the book might sell like strawberries in summer."

He went out, cashed the cheque he had received for his short story, paid Mrs. Jinks' bill, and waited for the morrow. And when the morrow came, he found Messrs. Caxton and Wall surprisingly easy to deal with, and when he left, after an hour's interview, he carried with him a very substantial cheque and a copy of an agreement drawn up by that estimable firm for his future emolument.

* * * * *

Nearly two years had sped by since Max Villiers' first book had taken the world by storm, and its author found himself famous. A second book had just been published, and the

"Is this what you lost?" he asked, holding up a sovereign.

avidity with which it was already being read promised well for its success. The old-time poverty was almost forgotten, though there were still times when his mind went back to those early days, and that sympathy with the poor, awakened only by personal experience, warmed his heart with the love of humanity and led him to many a noble deed. It was early autumn, and he had accepted the invitation of a wealthy book-lover to spend a few weeks at his estate in Rutlandshire. Other guests, he was informed, would be present, all more or less of an artistic or literary turn of mind, and he anticipated an agreeable time. The place was not easy of access, and, after accomplishing about three-fourths of the journey, he had to catch a local train at a sleepy country junction, which would convey him to his destination. But even here there were complications, and he was directed to take his seat in the front part of a train. The third carriage was comprised of first and second-class compartments, and into one of the former he stepped. There were three other carriages in the rear of the train, but these were to be disconnected a few miles further on. He settled himself comfortably in a corner of the compartment, and waited for the train to start. Presently he heard the voice of the guard.

"Front of the train, miss. This way, please!"

There were footsteps on the platform, and, a moment later, the guard flung open the door of his compartment, and a young lady, pretty and well dressed, entered. She started at sight of Max Villiers, but took her seat with apparent unconcern.

"Straight through for Magden Park," said the guard as he slammed the door.

Magden Park! Villiers looked up from the newspaper he was reading, and across at the girl opposite him. *He* was going to Magden Park. Was this girl one of the guests his host had spoken of? He hoped she was, for she looked sweet and dainty, and the blue eyes were frank and sunny. As soon as the train moved out of the station, she picked up a book she had brought with her, and, opening it half-way, began to read.

There was a light in Max Villiers' eyes as he recognised it as

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his own recent production. It was clear the book absorbed and fascinated her, but, once or twice, he thought he caught the girl's eyes fixed inquiringly on his face, while a little puzzled expression lingered about the pretty curved brows. Perhaps she recognised him. A great many people did that every day in his life now, and he was not surprised.

Soon they stopped at the station where the latter half of the train was to be disconnected. The guard who had accompanied them hitherto, remained in his van at the rear of the rear half of the train, while a new guard, who had been waiting on the platform, took his station in a similar van between the engine and the three carriages which were to go on in front. The carriage containing Max Villiers and his fair fellow-traveller would therefore be at the extreme end of the first train.

There was some slight delay at first, owing to the mistake of a sleepy-looking porter who officiated at the little country station. It was his duty to disconnect the couplings of the train in order to divide it for its respective journeys, and, instead of doing this behind the carriage containing Max Villiers, he did so between it and the carriage before it. Fortunately, the guard chanced to notice the mistake before the engine moved on, and the porter was ordered to connect the couplings again and disconnect those at the rear of Villiers' carriage. A few moments, and they were off again.

The district was hilly, and, half a mile further on, they could look back at the sleepy little station they had just left, lying peacefully down in the valley below. They were going up now, and the gradient was unusually steep. But there was little to encumber the locomotive, and it sped up the steep incline as though it were on level ground. On they went, the ground still rising, until one could look over a vast expanse of fertile country.

But the girl was deep in her book, and Max Villiers' thoughts were divided between his newspaper and various speculations as to his fair companion's opinion of his own work. So the magnificent view passed all unnoticed, and the train approached the crest of a hill.

Suddenly there was a violent jerk, and, in spite of the speed at which they were travelling, the carriage came almost simultaneously to a standstill. Both its occupants were taken at a disadvantage, and assumed different but equally ridiculous postures. Recovering themselves, however, their eyes met, and the comicality of the situation made them both laugh.

"Some obstacle on the track, I suppose," said Villiers. "But the engine-driver might consider the dignity of his passengers with a greater degree of nicety."

The girl laughed and looked out of the window.

"But we are running back," she said. "I wonder if anything is wrong."

Max Villiers rose from his seat and put his head out of the window. They were, indeed, running backwards down the steep grade of a hill, and the pace was growing greater as they descended. But that was not all he saw. Glancing momentarily forward, he saw, far away in the distance, the remainder of the train, now disappearing over the crest of the hill. Something must have happened to the couplings, for their carriage had separated from the rest of the train, and, answering to the law of gravity, had come to a standstill on the brow of the hill and then run back down the steep incline. There was a catch in the man's throat as he drew in his head and looked at the girl's inquiring face.

"We have been separated from the rest of the train and are running down hill again," he said quietly. "There is no cause for alarm, however, and I will stand out on the footboard to keep a sharp look-out ahead."

The girl's face grew white and her lips twitched.

"The second half of the train is somewhere behind us," she said.

"It is in front of us now," corrected Max. "But have no fear. We are in no danger as yet, and we must keep up courage."

The girl nodded, and, rising, straightened herself bravely.

"That's right," said Max approvingly. "We shall come to very little harm if we both keep our heads."

He opened the carriage door as he spoke, and, stepping out on to the footboard, peered searchingly ahead. As yet he could see nothing of the second train, and hope rose within him. It would, he knew, be delayed some minutes at the little station, while a locomotive was connected. There was just a bare possibility that they might come in sight of the station before the second train had started. Yet, even if this were so, would their danger be thereby lessened? Would they not go crashing into the great mass of metal? He scarcely dared think—and he stood far out on the foot-board and waited till the carriage should turn the curve in the track and come in sight of the distant station. They were going much too fast now to think of leaping from the carriage. It was not so steep a little lower down, and the impetus would decrease. Perhaps he might risk it there. But the girl. He could not leave her—that was out of the question.

He had made light of their danger, but he could see she was not deceived. He looked back, and saw her still standing where she had risen, her face very white, but with the light of courage in her blue eyes. Even in that moment, Max marvelled at her mingled beauty and courage, and an admiration the like of which he had never before felt for any woman, entered his heart.

Presently they turned the curve, and Max saw the second train still standing by the station platform. It was just on the point of starting, and the first white column of steam shot upward from the locomotive. Then it stopped, and, with quick presence of mind, the driver reversed the propelling lever and the train steamed backward out of the station. But it was too late. The impetus they had gained was now too great to save them from collision, and the speeding carriage was almost at the station.

But another person was watching the racing carriage. Up in his box the station signalman stood, his hand on a long steel lever and his face pressed against the window. Not until he saw how inevitable was the impending collision did he jam the great lever down that altered the points at the little station. There was a short siding on the opposite side of the platform, where the locomotive waited until the first half of the train had gone on. A buttress of stonework and masonry was at the end, in which two black iron buffers were embedded. The impact here would be even greater than with the retreating train, but the signalman had to consider the safety of the train and its passengers, as well as that of the solitary carriage and its two occupants. Max saw the points jerked back, and, instantly realising what this portended, leapt back into the carriage, swung open the door on the further side, and stepped on to the footboard.

"Now for it!" he said. "You must trust yourself to me, and we may get off scot-free. Come close to me. You are not very big, and I am not a weakling. Do not be frightened. I am going to jump!"

He lifted her up in his arms as if she had been a child, and waited, his back against the speeding carriage. They were going less swiftly now, but still fast enough to make the leap he meditated perilous in the extreme. But there was that stout buttress of masonry ahead, and, going at that pace, the springs with which the buffers were fitted might as well have been wholly absent.

A few moments and they were abreast of the platform. Setting his teeth, and summoning up all the dormant strength in his manly frame, Max Villiers tightened his arms about the girl and leapt. The platform seemed to spin under him as his feet touched it, and he stumbled forward with a great gasp. But he kept his feet, though the great veins stood out like cords in his temples and neck, and beads of perspiration stood upon his forehead.

Then, placing the trembling girl on a seat close by, he sank down exhausted and leant his head on his hands. Even the crash of the carriage as it struck the buffers—the splintering and rending of wood and the twisting of ironwork underneath—failed to reach him. Man as he was, Max Villiers had fainted.

* * * * *

A fortnight had slipped by, and most of the guests in the big

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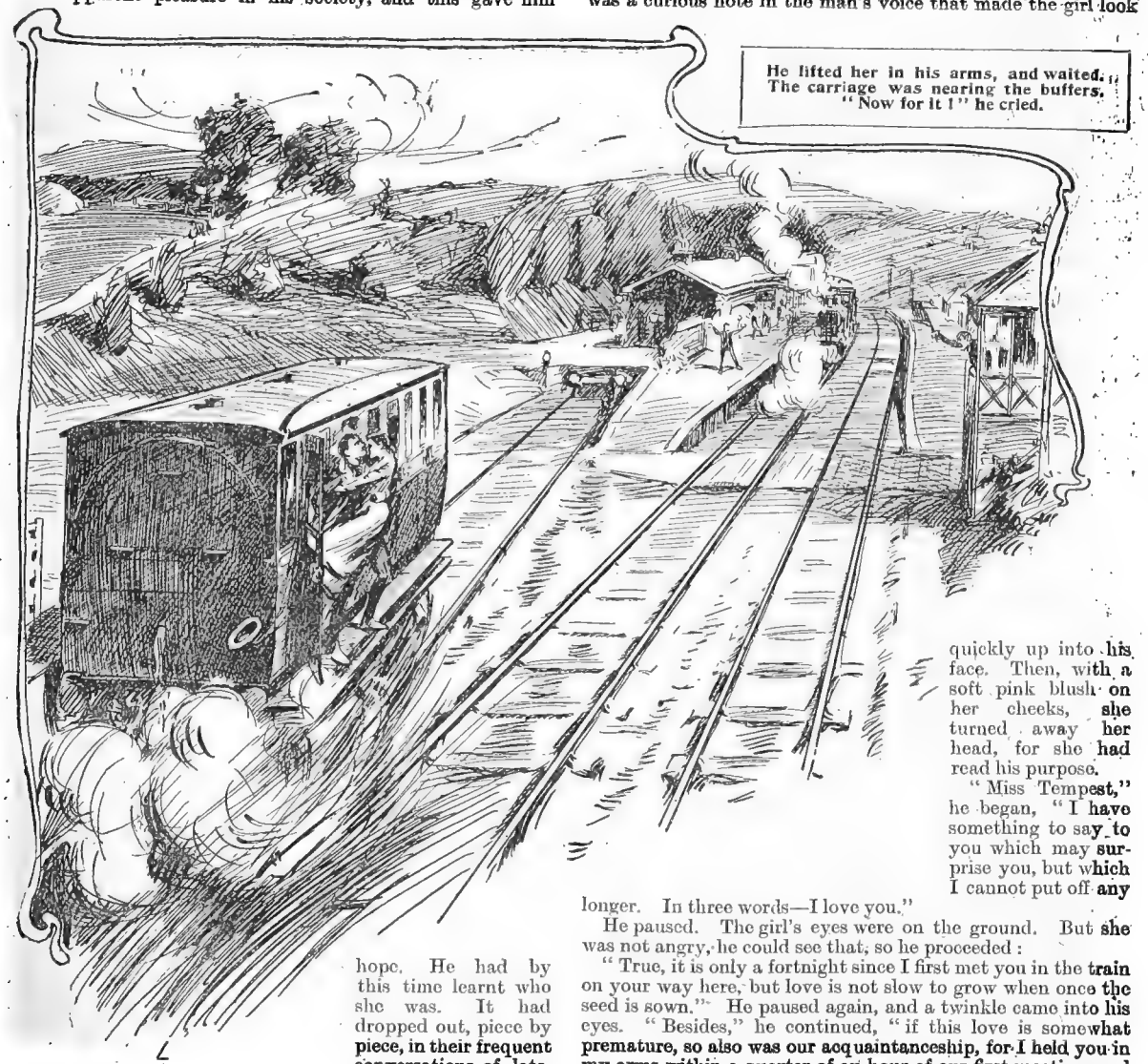
modern mansion at Magden Park had taken their departure. Max Villiers and his fair travelling companion of two short weeks ago were among the few who still remained, and more than one was heard to whisper a prediction concerning them regarding their future relationship. And there was, in truth, ample reason for such predictions. For the first time in his life, Max Villiers had yielded to an attraction so potent that it subjugated every other consideration. He was in love, and he fully realised it. But the lady? Well, he was not addicted to vanity, but he saw quite clearly that she, too, took some apparent pleasure in his society, and this gave him



He lifted her in his arms, and waited. The carriage was nearing the buffers. "Now for it!" he cried.

hope. He had by this time learnt who she was. It had dropped out, piece by piece, in their frequent conversations of late, and Max felt a growing sympathy with the girl whose early life had so nearly resembled his own. She was an artist, but, until the last two years, Success had eluded her. And then the turn of the tide had come, and she, like himself, had taken it at the flood. Steadily but surely she had mounted the ladder of Fame, and now stood not far from the topmost rung. One brilliant masterpiece—a conception of great originality and power—had effected the change, and now her progress was easy and her name well-known as one of the greatest living lady artists. And then Max told her his own story, so like hers that it seemed almost repetition, and their common experience bred that uncommon understanding which nurtures the truest sympathy and finds the warmest echo in the human heart.

And now they, too, were about to bid farewell to the lovely Rutlandshire scenery, and once more take their place among the toilers in the big city. But before they went away, Max Villiers was determined to know his fate. They had wandered out into the great shady park, and were sitting in a little arbour hidden away beneath the tall old elms. There was a curious note in the man's voice that made the girl look quickly up into his face. Then, with a soft pink blush on her cheeks, she turned away her head, for she had read his purpose.

"Miss Tempest," he began, "I have something to say to you which may surprise you, but which I cannot put off any longer. In three words—I love you."

He paused. The girl's eyes were on the ground. But she was not angry, he could see that, so he proceeded:

"True, it is only a fortnight since I first met you in the train on your way here, but love is not slow to grow when once the seed is sown." He paused again, and a twinkle came into his eyes. "Besides," he continued, "if this love is somewhat premature, so also was our acquaintanceship, for I held you in my arms within a quarter of an hour of our first meeting, and the experiment has given me an appetite."

Blanche Tempest looked up quickly.

"You mustn't be impudent," she said sternly, but there was no rebuke in her eyes.

"Ah," said Max earnestly, "I think you know enough of me to make you free from fear on that account. You are the only woman I have ever loved, dear, and it seems like a new world to me. But that world will know no sunshine until I have heard from your own lips that it is not I alone who love. Do not think me over-bold, dearest, but remember that your

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answer affects the whole of my future life. With you, that life will be untold happiness—without you, it must be an endless regret."

He stopped and looked down at the averted face of the girl at his side. She took out her purse, and, from an inner compartment, drew out a sovereign. She looked at it a moment, and then handed it to him.

"I think I owe you this," she said shyly. "Let me discharge the debt before we talk further."

Max Villiers was bewildered. His face flushed, and he rose from his seat. But Blanche rose also, and stood facing him, the gold coin still in her hand.

"I don't understand," Max faltered at last. "You—you owe me nothing. How could you? I have never lent you anything."

"It was nearly two years ago," said the girl steadily. "You and I were in an A.B.C. shop in the Strand, and we were both poor. I had lost a sovereign, or thought I had, and you pretended to pick it up. No one knows how grateful I felt to you, for that was my last sovereign. But when I got home, I found *my* sovereign in the lining of my dress, and then I understood. I tried to find you, in order to return it to you, for—for—I thought you might need it as much as I. But I couldn't. And it was only when I saw you in the train two short weeks ago that I recognised you. But you were prosperous then, and so I waited."

Max Villiers looked at the proffered sovereign in evident embarrassment.

"But I can't take it," he said. "Keep it in remembrance of that our first meeting."

Blanche shook her head.

"No," she said decisively. "You must take it."

There was a long pause, and then their eyes met. A great joy leapt into Villiers' heart, and he grew bolder than before.

"What about the interest?" he asked, taking the little hand, sovereign and all, into his strong grasp. "It accumulates in two years, you know."

"How much do you demand?" she asked archly.

"The biggest I can get," he said.

"Single or compound?" inquired the girl.

"A better than either," was the answer.

'And what interest may that be?" she asked again.

"Human interest," he said promptly. "I am a novelist, you know, and the demand is therefore appropriate."

They both laughed, and looked deep into each other's eyes. Then Max Villiers drew the girl into his embrace and took the first kiss of love from those ripe, sweet lips. For a moment or two they stood thus in silence—his arms about her waist, her heard resting on his shoulder.

Walter J. Mowbray.

THE INDECISION OF ELSA

Telling of a Waiter who Spoke French, and of a Happy Deception.

"TELL me, Elsa, what is it to be?"

"Oh, I do not know what to say; I feel differently every minute, Jack."

The speakers were Jack Selwyn and Elsa Cunningham. This made the fifth occasion during the past three months on which Jack had proposed to Elsa; but she could never make up her mind. She always knew that she was very fond of him but exactly how fond she was never certain.

"But surely you must know, Elsa. I know that I love you. It seems to me you must be certain one way or the other."

"I cannot help it, Jack; I really do not know. I have never had to do without you since I have known you well."

Neither spoke again for some time, and each appeared to be thinking deeply. At length Jack broke the silence.

"I cannot understand, Elsa, why you are unable to say 'yes' or 'no.' It is a subject on which I should think every man or woman would be decided."

She made no reply, evidently she had no answer to his attack. Suddenly she exclaimed:

"If you were to go away, Jack."

"Go away?" he cried in pained tones.

"Yes, just for a few months, then I should know. Besides, it would be a good test for you, perhaps you might meet some other girl you would like better than me."

"Elsa!" There was real pain in his tones now. And then with a little compassionate cry she put her arms round his neck and kissed him. A short interval ensued.

"I mean it, Jack," Elsa went on. "It would be better for both of us if we do not see each other for a few months."

"Not that, Elsa. I must have you," he cried.

"But, Jack, old boy, you must see it will be for the best."

"But why need we separate? You care for me a great deal, and that will increase as time goes on."

"Will it, Jack? That is just what I want to make sure of."

She put her arms round his neck again, and gazed right into his eyes. A wonderful pity seized her as she saw the mute pain that was apparent there.

"If I was certain, Jack, dear, I would not hesitate a moment." The upshot of it all was that Jack Selwyn agreed to Elsa's proposal for a separation. It was to be for three months; then, if Elsa felt she really could not do without him, she was to write. It was taken for granted that he would not forget her in that time.

After some discussion it was decided that an occasional letter might be written, but in no case were they to become frequent.

It was with very heavy hearts that they parted that evening. When the time for the last "Good-bye" came they found it much harder than they had anticipated. But they were resolved to carry out their plan. And so they parted.

It was at the end of June that they said "Good-bye." July had now gone and August was half over. Elsa was seated on the verandah of the High Cliff Hotel at Westport. She was engaged in reading a letter from Jack Selwyn; the third she had received since they parted, now nearly two months ago.

A wistful look was in her eyes as she read and re-read his letter. A look which, had Jack Selwyn seen, would have vanquished all his doubts for ever.

So she sat and dreamt dreams of days that were gone, and days that might be. Would he come back, she wondered, when those three months were over. But her reverie was disturbed by the entry of a waiter, whose slouching gait and dark, sinister face were just as foreign to the object of Elsa's thoughts as chalk is to cheese.

Elsa Cunningham and her aunt, Mrs. Crabtree, were staying at Westport for several weeks. The holiday did not seem to be doing Elsa much good, for she invariably wore a pensive, almost worried look. Mrs. Crabtree grew quite upset at times.

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"My dear Elsa," she would say, "you must look better or else your father and mother will be sorry that they ever let me take you away."

"That's all right, Aunt Lou. Don't you worry; I shall turn up trumps."

Elsa's style of speech was often rather slangy, but that is the mode of the present day.

"That Mr. Ward is a nice young man. Do you not think so, Elsa?"

"Cannot say that I'm particularly struck with him," replied Elsa, to whom young men, with one exception, bore no attraction now.

"I wish you would not use those slang expressions of yours, my dear. They do not sit well on you. Now, I think Mr. Ward is a very nice, gentlemanly young man, and I think he likes you, Elsa."

"Does he?" was the indifferent reply.

"Yes, I am sure he does, dear. In fact, I have asked him to take tea with us this afternoon."

"What!" Elsa started as if she had been shot. "Asked him to take tea with us?" she repeated. "Whatever for?"

"Oh, I like him," replied Mrs. Crabtree somewhat lamely. "And I thought he would be company for you."

"Company, I don't want his company," cried Elsa scornfully; and to herself she said, "Oh, Jack, Jack, why are you not here?"

"Surely Mr. Ward is near enough," she went on, "without asking him to tea. He is staying in the same hotel, and I should have thought that it was quite enough to see him at dinner, let alone inviting him to tea."

"Surely, Elsa, the young man is not objectionable to you."

"Oh, my dear aunt, no. Mr. Ward can come if he likes or stop away if he likes." Which was equivalent to saying that she wished to hear nothing more about Mr. Ward.

Mr. Frederick Ward was a young gentleman favoured with plenty of money and nothing to do but to spend it. I say favoured, for to have nothing to do but to spend money is regarded by many people as the greatest of favours. At any rate, Mr. Ward was honouring the High Cliff Hotel with his presence. Also he was very much smitten with Elsa Cunningham, and with the wiliness of a diplomatist, had set himself to woo the chaperon first. Thus it was that Mrs. Crabtree characterised Mr. Ward as "a nice young man."

He had introduced himself on the cliff, and had immediately rendered Mrs. Crabtree assistance by raising the hood of her chair so as to resist the sun's rays. In many ways he had made himself useful to Elsa's aunt, and had thus succeeded in the first stages of his campaign.

There was too much self-opinionated conceit about him to please Elsa. He smirked as he spoke, and smelt like a perfume shop. And when I say that Elsa loathed him, I am well within bounds. In fact, she had referred to him as "an insufferable cad."

However, he duly presented himself at the private sitting-room which his hostess occupied, and professed himself "charmed" to see Mrs. Crabtree and her niece.

The same waiter who had already offended Elsa's artistic susceptibilities brought in the tea. Not that I wish to infer that waiters are artistic subjects, but there are waiters and waiters, and this man was one of the other sort.

As he passed Mr. Frederick Ward his foot appeared to catch in a rug, with the result that a certain amount of hot tea disported itself on the immaculate clothing of Frederick. That gentleman swore, not loudly, I admit, but Elsa caught the words, and her lip curled scornfully.

The waiter apologised, and Mr. Ward was good enough to say that it did not matter, for it occurred to him that such an attitude would perhaps raise him in the estimation of the ladies. Inwardly, though, he was far from smiling, for, in common with many small-minded people, he was exceedingly mean.

When the waiter returned again with some more edibles, it occurred to Mr. Ward that this would be a remarkably fine chance of displaying how clever he was. Thereupon he turned to Elsa, and slowly, with a painful accent, said:

"*Voici encore le cochon gauche*," which, for the benefit of those who have studied other languages than French, is interpreted as "Here is the clumsy pig again."

If it had been possible for him to have sunk lower in Elsa's estimation he would have done, but I think it was impossible. Also I am perfectly sure she beamed with enjoyment when the waiter remarked:

"*Merci, Monsieur*," and his accent was admirable.

Ward flushed very red; how dare a waiter know French? He turned, and in agonising French asked the waiter how he came to know the language. Elsa has said she could have almost kissed him for his reply, which was:

"Pardon, sir, but I do not speak German."

Elsa laughed outright whilst Mr. Ward almost boiled with indignation. The waiter bowed himself out.

"These common fellows have too many airs, do you not think so, Miss Cunningham?"

"He seems a very well educated man, and speaks French as well as he does English, you should get him to teach you."

And with this Parthian shot Elsa retired from the room.

All this time Mrs. Crabtree had sat in bewilderment, glancing from one to the other. But when Elsa had gone out of the room she turned to Ward and said:

"My dear Mr. Ward, I am very sorry that this has taken place. You will please accept my apologies; Elsa is such a wilful girl."

Mr. Frederick Ward had been swearing to himself ever since the departure of Elsa. The calamities that he wished would overtake the waiter would have excited the admiration of the most barbarous of savages. He mentally resolved that the man should suffer for being the means of his discomfiture.

Some days passed by, and in the meantime Elsa had replied to Jack Selwyn's letter. Now, whether there was anything in the letter she wrote which gave him a clue to her more settled feelings I cannot say for certain; but I know that she received, just a few days afterwards, a very long letter in reply. In that letter he stated that his feelings had undergone a change, and that he loved her still more than ever.

Thereupon Elsa resolved that when she wrote again it should be to summon him to her. But she decided that it would not do to appear too hasty and came to the conclusion that it would be as well to wait a few days.

Frederick Ward seemed in no wise knocked under by the severe snubbing he had received at Elsa's hands, but became more and more attentive to Mrs. Crabtree and her niece. When I say Elsa snubbed him, I hardly express her real attitude, she seemed almost rude to him. But then, there are some creatures to whom it is not rude to be rude, to use a Hibernism.

But Elsa put up with it quite happily, the thought of Jack keeping her spirits high. She seemed quite a different girl to the dejected Elsa who had come to Westport. Mrs. Crabtree put it down to the attractions of Mr. Ward, and endeavoured more than ever to throw them together at every opportunity.

In her last letter to Jack, Elsa had referred to Ward, and in his reply Selwyn had said, "I should like to teach that cad a lesson, do not be surprised if I do." Which remark Elsa had looked upon as a fond extravagance.

Mr. Frederick Ward still nursed a bitter feeling of resent-

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ment against the unfortunate waiter, and during the past few days had concocted a plan by which he was to revenge himself.

The general hour for dining at the High Cliff Hotel was seven o'clock, and on the Wednesday evening the large saloon was fairly full of diners.

Enter Mr. Frederick Ward.

Mr. Wilberforce, the manager of the hotel, in evening dress, passed through the saloon soon afterwards, but his progress was arrested by Ward.

"By the way, Wilberforce," he exclaimed loudly. "During the last two nights a diamond pin and a pair of diamond cuff-links have disappeared from my room, and I have reason to believe that they have been stolen."

Had he accused the manager of stealing them himself, I doubt if the diners would have been more astonished. Certainly it was annoying to lose things, or have them stolen, but it was hardly the thing to announce it as Ward was doing.

"I am exceedingly sorry, but if you will come to my office I will look into the matter without delay."

"It does not require looking into, for I have means of knowing that the thief is there."

Ward pointed in a melodramatic way at the unfortunate waiter. Beyond a slight trembling of his hands, however, that individual took no notice of the accusation.

"Barton," cried the manager to the waiter, "come to my office. I should be glad, if you, too, Mr. Ward, would come when you have finished dining."

"Certainly," he replied. "You will, of course, keep a sharp watch on that man, though."

The manager and waiter withdrew to the office, and there a long conversation took place, the details of which I shall set down later.

Meanwhile Mr. Ward was giving his views in general on the subject.

"Have a detective down from London," he said. "Most abominable, have things stolen like this."

Although he was always speaking, Ward made a practice of using as few words as possible, with the idea that it would be a striking reality. At any rate it served to exercise the talents of mimicry possessed by various of the more junior males at the "High Cliff," much to the delight, I am afraid I must record it, of the opposite sex.

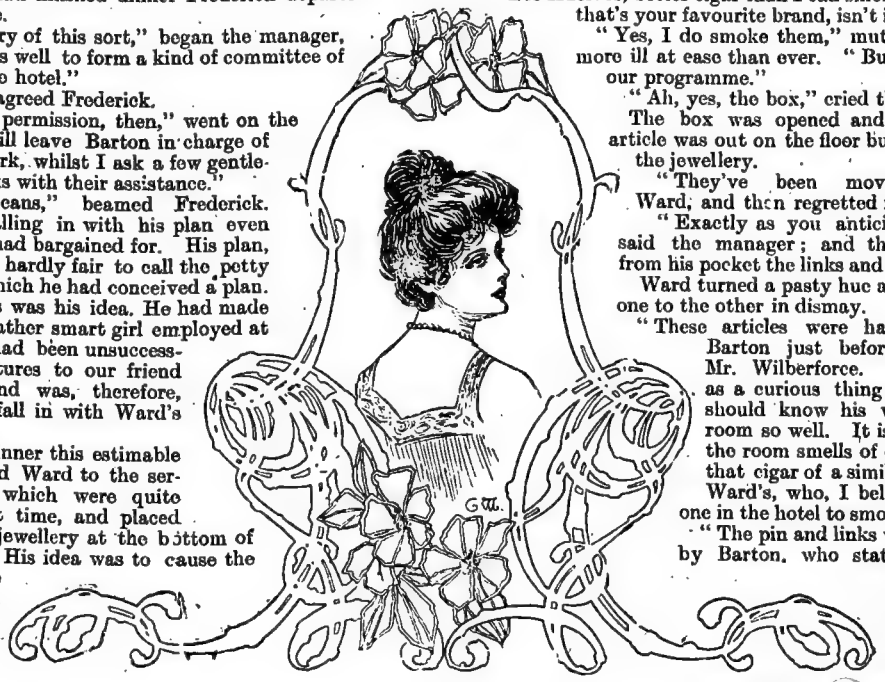
"When he had finished dinner Frederick departed to the manager's office.

"In an inquiry of this sort," began the manager, "it is always as well to form a kind of committee of the guests at the hotel."

"Quite so," agreed Frederick.

"With your permission, then," went on the manager, "I will leave Barton in charge of you and my clerk, whilst I ask a few gentlemen to favour us with their assistance."

"By all means," beamed Frederick. Events were falling in with his plan even better than he had bargained for. His plan, I said; but it is hardly fair to call the petty mean artifice which he had conceived a plan. At any rate this was his idea. He had made friends with a rather smart girl employed at the hotel who had been unsuccessful in her overtures to our friend the prisoner, and was, therefore, quite eager to fall in with Ward's scheme.



Just before dinner this estimable lady had piloted Ward to the servants' quarters which were quite deserted at that time, and placed the articles of jewellery at the bottom of Barton's box. His idea was to cause the box to be searched and thus disgrace Barton.

This was a man who would refer to himself as a gentleman, and yet a petty spite would allow him to lower himself to this extent. Such a creature is not worthy of the name of man.

Presently the manager returned, and with him several of the guests. Prior to their arrival at the office an animated conversation had taken place, which resulted in broad smiles on all their faces.

"Mr. Ward, you have made an accusation against this man, and we shall be pleased to hear your case."

"My case, gentlemen, is very simple," began Ward. "Last night, going along corridor, saw man leave my room hastily, that man was that waiter. Found my tie, pin, and my links were missing."

"I did not go in your room at all last night, neither have I been in it at all," said the waiter.

"I demand to have his box searched," cried Ward. "He is sure to have hidden the things."

"Is that justifiable, do you think, gentlemen?" asked the manager.

"Certainly," was the reply.

"Then let us go to his room," cried Ward triumphantly.

They started towards the servants' quarters, the manager starting forward to lead the way. Someone seized his arm and restrained him, at the same time pointing to Ward, who, in his eagerness, was acting as guide.

The manager chuckled quietly and followed.

Ward led them straight to the room and threw open the door.

"Now, gentlemen," he cried.

"You seem to know your way about, Mr. Ward," remarked the manager.

Confusion reigned with Frederick, and he mentally reviled his eagerness.

"Notice things, you know," he remarked with an attempt at coolness, but he was obviously ill at ease.

"Nice cigars you smoke, Barton," said the manager. "I thought I had forbidden smoking in the servant's bedrooms."

"I have not smoked any cigars in my bedroom," replied the waiter.

"H'm! curious," remarked Mr. Wilberforce, and then he suddenly stooped and picked up the coloured paper band from a cigar.

"Los Huelvos, better cigar than I can smoke. By the way, that's your favourite brand, isn't it, Mr. Ward?"

"Yes, I do smoke them," muttered Frederick, more ill at ease than ever. "But let us carry out our programme."

"Ah, yes, the box," cried the manager.

The box was opened and presently every article was out on the floor but not a vestige of the jewellery.

"They've been moved!" shrieked Ward, and then regretted it immediately.

"Exactly as you anticipated, Barton," said the manager; and then he produced from his pocket the links and pin.

Ward turned a pasty hue and glanced from one to the other in dismay.

"These articles were handed to me by Barton just before dinner," said Mr. Wilberforce. "It strikes me as a curious thing that Mr. Ward should know his way to Barton's room so well. It is also queer that the room smells of cigar smoke and that cigar of a similar brand to Mr. Ward's, who, I believe, is the only one in the hotel to smoke them.

"The pin and links were given to me by Barton, who stated that having found himself to be without a handkerchief, he had hurriedly rushed to his

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room to obtain one. There he found a distinct smell of smoke, and observed that the lid of his box was down, when he distinctly remembered having left it ajar. He immediately opened the box and saw that the contents had been disturbed; continuing his search he found the jewellery which he gave to me.

"I asked him if he had any clue, and whether there was anyone who had any grudge against him. The only man he could think of was Mr. Ward for the reasons which I have given you."

Here the manager referred to the incident of the French conversation at the tea table.

"Now, sir," he said, turning to Ward. "Have you anything to say to disprove this?"

Ward made no reply, but his abject look condemned him.

"We are waiting," said the manager.

Then Ward began to bluster, and spoke of his honour and other equally foreign things. But he made no impression.

"Gentlemen," went on the manager, "I think you will agree with me that Barton is quite innocent, and that, having no direct proof, the person who has done this thing is unknown apparently. But I must ask Mr. Ward to be good enough to vacate his rooms by to-morrow."

"And if I do not?" snarled Ward.

"Then I shall make the story public, and I think I know what the general verdict would be."

Thus Mr. Frederick Ward passes out of this history to be seen no more.

It transpired that the servant girl on observing the commotion had become frightened and confessed her share in the matter to the manager, but he had preferred to hear Ward convicted out of his own mouth.

"That's your nice young man," remarked Elsa. "What do you think of him now, Aunt Lou?"

"My dear, I am going to bed," replied that lady; which was hardly an answer to the question.

As soon as Mrs. Crabtree had gone out of the room, Elsa sat down and hastily commenced to write. She had decided to summon Jack Selwyn, and with that intent, was inditing a letter to him.

Suddenly the door opened, and the waiter entered with a letter on a tray. Elsa pounced on it, and saw to her joy that the handwriting was that of Jack Selwyn.

It was but a short note, and Elsa eagerly devoured the contents, quite unaware that the waiter was still in the room. The letter ran as follows:

"My Dearest Elsa,—*I cannot wait any longer, and am coming to take my answer verbally. I shall be with you this evening; please be merciful.*

"*Yours ever,*

"Jack."

In her excitement she laughed aloud, and cried "Dear old Jack," and then impetuously kissed the letter. The waiter coughed. With flaming cheeks Elsa turned on him:

"Why, Barton," she said, "are you still here?"

The waiter thought for a moment, and then admitted that he was.

"Oh, Barton, I wanted to say how pleased I was that Mr. Ward was found out please get me a Bradshaw." This all in a breath.

When he departed to fulfil his mission, a sudden thought struck Elsa.

"Why, Jack told me not to be surprised if Mr. Ward was taught a lesson, only he said he would do it. How quaint a coincidence!"

Here Barton entered with a Bradshaw.

"Can I find you the place, miss?"

"I want trains from London, Barton."

"There are no more trains to-night, miss. Last train gets in at half-past seven. It's nine o'clock now."

"Are you sure?" cried Elsa, with all the gaiety gone from her voice.

"Quite, miss."

"Thank you, Barton. That will do."

"Are you sure, Elsa?" came another voice.

With a glad little cry Elsa jumped up, but there was only Barton there.

"Why I thought——" she began, then she stared at Barton who actually smiled at her.

Suddenly she sprang forward, and placed her hands on the waiter's shoulders.

"Jack!" she almost screamed. "Jack, you?"

"Yes, Elsa, me," remarked that individual as he removed a heavy dark wig from his light brown hair, and a large black moustache from his upper lips. He gravely proceeded to dust the charcoal from his eyebrows, and to rub out a few painted wrinkles. Whilst all the time Elsa watched in happy wonderment.

"Oh, you dear, silly old boy," she cried. "And do you mean to say you have been here all the time?"

"Yes, dear, I could not bear to be parted from you altogether, so I got a friend of mine connected with the stage to make me up, and then I got a situation here. Of course, I had to disguise my walk and voice as well."

"I only intended to keep it up a little while, though, but friend Ward interested me so much that I resolved to see him out. I sent my letters to a chum in London to post down again. And now here I am. Are you glad to see me?"

"Glad," she echoed. "Oh, Jack, I am so happy, and I never want to let you go away from me again."

I will not chronicle the rest of the proceedings, which were purely of a private nature. Mr. and Mrs. Jack Selwyn may often be seen at Westport now, at least once a year, and they always stay at the same hotel.

E. Newton Bungey.

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Clever Animal.

Jinks: "Yes, she has brought her dog up in the most fashionable way." Binks: "Indeed." Jinks: "Yes, he barks at anyone who is worth under half a million."

No Doubt About It.

Young Husband: "My dear Mabel, I must say that this pudding doesn't taste very nice." Wife: "All imagination, dear, it says in the cookery-book that it tastes excellent!"

Suited Her Admirably.

Mr. Goodenough: "I have so much trouble with the pronunciation of my name; it is properly pronounced Good-no, you know." She (shyly): "Yes, but it is Good-enough for me."

Would Realise His Hopes.

Mr. Highnote (at an amateur musicale): "What's he singing?" Miss Sweetvoice: "'Let me like a Soldier Die.'" Mr. Highnote: "If I had a gun with me he should be gratified."

Smith Knew Something.

Jones (leaving for the Continent): "When I'm in Rome I'll do as the Romans do." Smith: "Indeed, you won't. You'll do as the English do—pay twice as much for everything as anyone else would."

He Was Number One.

Excited Lady (at the telephone): "I want my husband, please, at once." Telephone Girl (from the Exchange): "Number, please?" Excited Lady (snappishly): "How many do you think I've got, you impudent thing?"

The Bonnet—or Death.

Husband: "Wake up, wake up! The house is on fire, Maria." Wife (imploringly): "Oh, save my new bonnet, John!" Husband (determinedly): "I will. It cost more than anything else in the house."

And Then They Went to Press.

They were sitting side by side on the sofa, when the young author said: "Yes, I have a new volume in the press." "How I envy that volume," said the roguish girl; and when he saw the point, they were both very, very happy.

Tricks of the Trade.

Mrs. Rushyew: "But are you not taking considerable risk in letting your young men owe for two or three weeks?" "Yes, there is some risk," said Mrs. Hashcroft. "But then, you see, they worry over it so that they lose their appetites. So I save money in the long run."

Quite Like the Real Thing.

Mrs. Jocelyn: "Don't you miss your husband very much now that he is away?" Mrs. Golightly: "Oh, not at all. You see, he left me plenty of money, and at breakfast I just stand a newspaper up in front of his place and half the time forget that he really isn't there."

A Very Clever Cook.

"They have some wonderful chefs in Paris." "Indeed!" "Yes. One of them can boil water in seventeen different styles."

The Turnip is a Beau.

"Don't talk to me," said the lettuce to the turnip; "I have a heart, and you haven't." "I don't see how that can be," replied the turnip. "You never get mashed, and I do."

The Worst of Cheap Cigars.

Mr. Edwards: "There's a terrible smell of boiling cabbage throughout the house." Mrs. Edwards: "Yes; we're boiling the lace curtains, in the hope of getting the tobacco smell out of them."

You Don't Say So!

"What is that old proverb about the moss and the rolling stone?" queried the country girl. "A revolving fragment of the paleozoic age collects no cryptogamous vegetation," replied her cousin from Girton.

Not the War Office This Time.

A health officer recently received the following note from one of the residents of his district: "Dear Sir,—I beg to tell you that my child, aged eight months, is suffering from measles as required by Act of Parliament."

Smart Youth.

Sammy: "Going to move soon, Tommy?" Tommy: "Yes." Sammy: "How do you know?" Tommy: "Ah! how d' I know? Didn't me mother lemme break a winder tother day an' didn't say nothin?"

They Were Always Late.

Roberts: "Time is precious." Smith: "It is, indeed, and I've wasted lots of it." Roberts: "By indulging in foolish pleasures, I suppose?" Smith: "No, I lost it by being punctual in keeping my appointments with others."

Accounted For It.

"It is strange what a time we have with cooks, dear," said Mrs. Inniscuos. "Dawson was telling me to-day that they've had theirs for ten years." "Yes, dear; and did he tell you who she was?" "No. Who?" "His wife."

A Terribly Tragic Poem.

He blushed a fiery red; her heart went pit-a-pat; she gently hung her head, and looked down on the mat. He trembled in his speech; he rose from where he sat, and shouted with a screech: "You're sitting on my hat!"

Then the Division Bell Rang.

"Papa," remarked the M.P.'s daughter, looking at the clock. "What is it, Lou?" asked papa, who had lingered in the drawing-room with the young people. "It is nine o'clock. At this time George and I usually go into committee." Then papa retired.

John Did His Duty.

"I hope you try to push business, John, even after office hours," said a coal dealer to his clerk, last January. "I do, sir," replied John. "I call upon a different girl every night, and never leave before twelve o'clock, and have a big fire going all the time."

He Wouldn't be Caught.

A mother of four daughters, of whom one had recently married, asked a young man sitting beside her in the drawing-room whom she would like to have for a son-in-law, "And which of my girls do you most admire?" He (fighting shy): "The married one."

He Would Long for the End.

"I feel," said the young man to her father, "that existence without your daughter would be only a dreary task, whose completion could not come too soon." "Very well," said the old gentleman, "take her, and presently you'll feel the same way, only more so."

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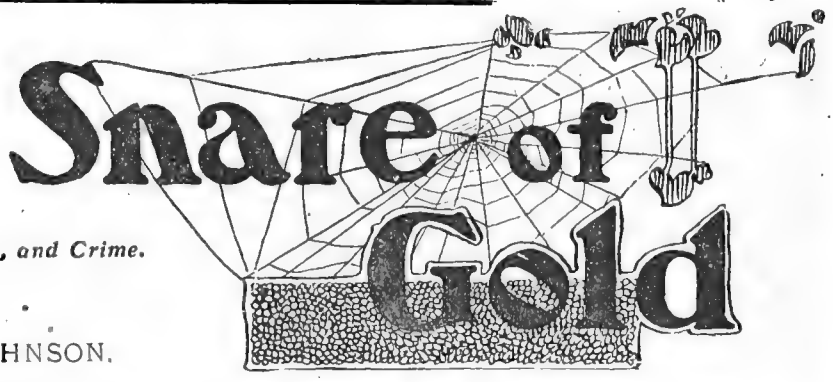
GRAND SERIAL STORY.

The Snare of Gold



A Tale of Love, Ambition, and Crime.

By

Henry T. Johnson.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THIS SPLENDID STORY ARE:

George Geldart, a former prosperous City merchant, supposed to be dead, and now known as "Old Mystery."

Eric Geldart, his elder son, who conspired to kill his father, thereby coming into his property. He is elected as an M.P.

Ronald Geldart, the younger son, who has been disinherited because he has been falsely accused of robbing his father.

Clare Armitage, the adopted sister of the two brothers, and who is betrothed to Eric.

Boanerges Blagdon, the traitorous partner of old Geldart, whom he has cheated in business, and who plots with Eric to murder him.

Sampson Scrimshaw, company promoter, who befriends "Old Mystery."

Mr. Stanyer, an Australian financier, who gives "Old Mystery" the post of English agent for his business.

Madeleine Lorraine, daughter of Lord Lynton, who is beloved by Eric Geldart.

Phyllis Daventry, typewriter to Scrimshaw, who takes a fancy to "Old Mystery." She is rescued from Hooligans by Ronald Geldart.

Jack Widdicombe, cousin to the brothers Geldart, and who is engaged on the *Meteor*.

EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER.

"What a Nice Girl!"

The *Meteor* was living up to its name. Its racy articles, brief but sparkling, contributed materially to the gaiety of nations. Its reviews and criticisms were the most brilliant of the day, its interviews were interesting word pictures of notable people with every little point of character accentuated without being exaggerated out of focus.

Society ladies were as keen on getting their portraits in its pages as on securing the lion of the season at their dinner parties. Politicians, authors, actors, artists in general preferred a slating in the *Meteor* to its ignoring them. The *Meteor* was blazing brilliantly, and Cousin Jack, its managing director, was partaking of and reflecting its brilliance.

No longer shabby and seedy with all the shine that ought to have been on his hat and boots transferred to his knees and elbows, but spruce and dapper, with a flower in his buttonhole and a twinkle in his eye, he positively beamed with prosperity at first nights and other press functions, and men who, seeing him approach, set their features and eyes in a cold, vacant, ignoring stare, relaxed them when they observed that Jack was in company with an M.P. or perhaps shaking hands with a lord.

And whereas George Geldart, who had in earlier days given Cousin Jack a start now and then, with the result that Jack had merely added one more to his list of failures, and he, Geldart, had with a grim chuckle upbraided himself for his folly in putting his money on so unreliable a horse, Scrimshaw metaphorically patted himself on the back for having made Jack Widdicombe business manager of the *Meteor*, besides having so found him work in other directions.

"That's the secret of success, Old Mystery," he said one night as they sat chatting after hours and enjoying a quiet dinner sent into the office on the second floor, "putting the right man in the right place; that was Napoleon's gift.

"Now lots of people shrugged their shoulders when I told them whom I was going to send to Bilbao, over the manganese job, and to Berlin to approach the Chancellor regarding the East African concessions. When I made the same man business manager of the *Meteor* they laughed outright, but I knew what was in the man and I knew how to get it out of him."

"Who is he?" asked Old Mystery, more out of politeness than curiosity.

"A capital fellow, good as gold, only a square peg in a round hole till I took him up. He knew my old dad and he was very good to me as a nipper, besides I could see a lot in him that other people couldn't. He came out of a very good stable, too; his name is Jack Widdicombe."

"What! Jack Widdicombe!" Old Mystery burst out involuntarily.

"You know him?" said the other with a keen glance.

"I used to slightly," said Geldart, with a forced air of indifference. "Of course you lost your money?"

"Just what I didn't do. Whatever the man put his hand at positively hummed along; he's been a regular mascot to me."

"It can't be the man I know," said Geldart, unable to realise the possibility of Cousin Jack being a success in anything, and not realising that when he himself had given Jack a chance, he had had it in a half-hearted way with a sort of settled conviction that it would be of no use, and that failure was a foregone conclusion, whereas Scrimshaw had set his man afloat wholly and heartily, and with the confidence in him that begat confidence in the man in himself.

But they were too intent upon the various ramifications of the System to devote further time or thought to Jack Widdicombe's failure or success.

They had, on a small scale, been giving the System a trial, and in the main the result had, to Scrimshaw's surprise, justified Old Mystery's faith in it, and they were now at work on figures and other matters with a view to remedying trifling defects or miscalculations that had come out in the working, prior to giving it another experimental trial.

They had started their experiments with a thousand pounds, a month's working had turned that into five thousand.

Now five thousand pounds was not a sum to take Scrimshaw's breath away; he frequently gave cheques to public subscriptions for much larger amounts; not necessarily in good faith, but as a guarantee for publication

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As he frankly said, if you judiciously selected your objects you could easily get out of ten thousand pounds in donations twenty thousand pounds' worth of common or garden advertisement, and he looked on public charity as a splendid field for booming.

But a profit of four thousand on a month's working with a thousand pounds was not a matter to be lightly estimated or appreciated, even by a Rothschild.

Four times one's principal on a month's working, or four thousand eight hundred per cent, upon the year—it was terrific! And on accumulated principal it opened up possibilities that staggered one.

Why, one man could corner all the gold and silver and copper—aye, all the wealth in all the world within a given, and not a lengthy period, only, as Old Mystery had pointed out at the beginning, you couldn't bring the principle of accumulated working into his System—it wouldn't do; it was against the principle of the System.

But he had demonstrated to Scrimshaw the pet scheme of his life—the scheme he had never yet found a man strong enough, keen enough, bold enough to venture on, and the scheme, that of its inherent nature could not be worked single-handed, but could be carried out as completely by two persons as by a dozen.

And so through the long summer evenings after dinner, dining at Crosby Hall or perhaps having dinner sent in, Scrimshaw, when not in requisition at the House, sat with Old Mystery over their cigars and their coffee elaborating, perfecting, and expending the wonderful wealth-gathering System.

But one evening between the lights, when the City was almost deserted, Old Mystery, gliding close to the wall, as was his habit, under the archway leading down the steps into, Crosby Square, almost brushed against—Cousin Jack, who, having jumped alertly out of a hansom, was scudding along to keep an appointment with the *Meteor's* proprietor.

Just for a moment or two the two men's eyes met, and Cousin Jack pulled himself up with a jerk like one who had received the shock of an electric current, then looked round. But It was gone. And when a few minutes later Jack Widdicombe sat in Scrimshaw's private office preparatory to going into certain matters of account, the Napoleon of finance scanning him curiously, said:

"I say, you're looking a bit off colour. Aren't you fit? Can I get you anything?"

"Well," said Cousin Jack, "if you happen to have any brandy, I'd like a nip."

"Certainly, I'll get you some," said Scrimshaw, suiting the action to the word. "By George, old fellow, you look as though you'd seen a ghost!"

"Thanks," said the other, gulping down the brandy almost neat; "by George, I think I have!"

Clickitty-click-click-click came the clatter and chatter of a typewriter from a distant room.

Then they went into the matters of the *Meteor*, and the proprietor remarked, "I say, that man Harvey Bligh was a good find of ours."

"Yes," said Widdicombe delightedly, "he was *my* find."

"Well, yes," replied Scrimshaw, "but in a way ours, for I discovered you and you discovered him. Have a cigar? By-the-way, what's his real name?"

"I'll have a cigar with pleasure," answered Widdicombe, "but I can't tell you his name."

"Why not?"

"Because I've promised."

Clickitty-clickitty-clackitty-clickitty—ting! Somehow Cousin Jack was reminded of a grasshopper.

"I never asked a man to break a promise yet," said Scrimshaw, "and I wouldn't give a pinch of salt for one who would."

"I know you wouldn't, Scrimshaw," said Cousin Jack. "I understand you better than most people."

"I think there's only one man understands me as well as you, Widdicombe."

"And he?"

Clackitty-clackitty-clack—rrrrrr! laughed the grasshopper-

"Well, I mustn't tell you who he is. Everybody has some secret to keep; you have yours, and if you blabbed to me the identity of Harvey Bligh I could never be sure that you weren't blabbing the identity of the proprietor of the *Meteor*. But now to business.

"I want a slashing article in next week's issue, it must be headed "Concerning Eric Geldart and his Little Party." Geldart's ratting, and he wants to take us of his party with him, bound hand and foot, into the Ministerial camp. I know his game; they've been promising old Lynton, whose daughter he's after, something in the Household and the reversion of the Lord Lieutenancy, and possibly an Under-Secretary's portfolio for Geldart himself. But he'll find the Little Party a mutinous and rampaging party if he tries to sell us, to deliver us, bound hand and foot, to the Philistines.

"Hammer it well in that the *Meteor* sees its game and that the *Meteor* means the public to see its game, and the *Meteor* means to baulk the paltry job. And now here comes my motor, I can give you a lift along the Embankment, but I've had a four-lined whip; I must get to the House in half an hour.

The door opened and in its frame there stood the prettiest picture Cousin Jack thought he had ever looked upon. What a shame for such a girl to be kept slaving at such an hour, and yet somehow he felt quite glad that on this occasion she had not left early.

"Ah, Miss Daventry, finished at last?" said Scrimshaw.

"Yes, Mr. Scrimshaw," said Phyllis pleasantly, but not quite able to repress a sigh of relief as she handed him a neatly-arranged and docketed set of papers.

"That's a good girl, sorry to keep you so late, only this was important and confidential."

Oh, then, this was an exceptional case. Cousin Jack wasn't quite so angry. And then the latter went on:

"Of course you've had some tea sent in?"

"Oh, no, sir, I knew that you were waiting and was afraid there wouldn't be time and I hardly liked to risk it."

"Then you're a silly, obstinate, brick of a little girl, and now be off with you."

With a laugh Phyllis nodded good night to her employer, also to Cousin Jack, who had risen to hold the door open.

"What a nice girl!" he said. He said so again to himself later in the evening strolling out of the theatre and musing that after all a fellow wasn't quite a fossil at forty-five.

And that night, strolling out of his club back to his flat, his comfortable, but rather lonely flat, he said again, quite to himself in confidence:

"What a nice girl!"

NINETEENTH CHAPTER.

The Brothers Meet.

Then came the time when Ronald Geldart upbraided himself that he had renounced the name that was his own and that he had not been more strenuous in clearing that name from the stain of unjust accusation.

His faith in his own work had been justified, but by his own action in dropping out of the circle he had lived in and in adopting another name, he had justified that circle's want of faith in his innocence.

He felt himself in a position of a man who has fairly run for and who has bravely won a race, for which he had entered with a false description.

And most of all he reproached himself after his second meeting with Madeleine Lorraine, for that second had been quickly followed by a third, a fourth, a dozen others.

It would be hardly accurate to say that their acquaintance, had, with time and opportunity, ripened into affection, because, as a matter of fact, they had fallen in love with each other almost spontaneously at their first meeting; all that happened was they had ceased all attempt to conceal this fact, either to themselves or each other

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As for the air of mystery surrounding her lover, Madeleine, who was after all only a girl, with a girl's natural predisposition to be romantic, delighted in it; it was an additional charm to her love affair to think that she was heart-in-heart with one of whom the world was saying, "Who can he be? What manner of man is this, whose work wins fame, a celebrity that thousands strive after in vain, yet who never mingles with the social world to taste the sweets that are his own?"

At times she yearned to tell her father, feeling that she was acting undutifully towards him, but she was restrained by the thought of his anger at discovering an obstacle to her marriage with Eric Geldart. For, as time went on, Lord Lynton became more frequently and urgently insistent in the matter of her acceptance of Eric Geldart's suit.

Geldart was making giant strides in politics, and the Earl's political interests were bound up with his own and those of his guerilla party; besides which, though she was not aware of it, her father was associated with Eric Geldart in certain financial ventures whereby Lynton sought to retrieve his shattered fortunes and Eric to multiply his own tenfold.

Again, all her life her father and she had somehow been far apart. Politics, fat stock breeding, and other pursuits had monopolised so much of Lynton's attention that there was not much to spare for the little motherless girl who had lived mostly, when away from school, with her aunt, Lady Harwardine, or with friends.

"Child and parent scarce regret,
When they part as strangers yet."

It was perhaps this feeling of isolation, despite her position, that drew Madeleine towards her clandestine lover. He loved her for herself.

At last she had met one to whom she would be and who would be to her all in all, and so for a brief space there were blissful stolen hours of sunshine, hours of drifting in the twilight down the river, watching the westering glory bathed in its bosom, she reaching out her shapely arms with punt pole, sculls, or paddle, while her lazy lover, in the seventh heaven of delight, leant back on the boat cushions, plunkity-plunking the banjo beloved of both, and watching the love-light in the face and eyes he deemed the fairest and the dearest in the world.

And on autumn mornings, while the mists were gliding upwards from the river like fairies in their robes of gossamer, sprinkled here and there by a munificent sun with diamonds, they would rest their cycles after an early morning spin against the lever beam of the lock gates, watching alert anglers, anxious that the early fish should catch the worm, and ardent boating men in shorts and sweaters, snatching a breather before donning the black coat and silk hat of civilisation, and taking morning trains to town.

And Eric Geldart took occasion to remark to Lord Lynton how strangely averse Madeleine of late had grown to town, and how remarkably devoted she had recently become to her aunt.

"Yes, egad!" said Lord Lynton, "she seems to think a lot more of Amelia than she does of me, but then you see she's off my hands; only there was a time when she used to find it frightfully dull at Amelia's with no other young people there."

This set Eric wondering. Was Lord Lynton's supposition as to the absence of young people well founded? Suppose—suppose. And all at once it dawned upon him that he was feeling fagged; an autumn sitting was in progress, there was no getting away, at all events for the grouse, and possibly not until late for the partridges; he'd have a week-end on the river.

Madeleine and her lover were leaning side by side on the rail of a foot-bridge crossing the river creek just between the lights, when the elms were looming black against the golden sky and the summer evening breeze was whispering

(*Continued overleaf.*)

HOLLOWAY'S PILLS

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have gained their wonderful reputation by sheer force of merit, because every person who uses them recommends them to others. They have positively no equal for thoroughly cleansing the system and putting the liver and kidneys in functional order, without pain or griping. They are the best known remedy for Indigestion, Biliousness, Headache, Dizziness, and the common condition of ill-health, known as "run-down" or "out of sorts." Females of every age find Holloway's Pills an invaluable remedy and aid.

THE OINTMENT

is known throughout the world as positively the best and quickest remedy for Bad Legs, Old Wounds and Sores, and Skin Eruptions of every kind, and should be used in conjunction with the Pills. It is also the speediest remedy for Rheumatism, Lumbago, Pains and Stiffness in the Limbs and Joints, Backache, &c. For pains and Soreness at the Chest, and for Throat and Lung Complaints arising from Cold or Weakness, Holloway's Ointment affords most welcome relief in a very short time.

A COMPLETE DISPENSARY IN THEMSELVES.

AND OINTMENT

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to the rushes below, and the boughs above, that they twain were lovers, and the leaves were laughing at what the breeze had said the lovers said.

"Good-bye, Harvey, dear," said Madeleine.

"Until to-morrow."

"Until to-morrow, I hardly know," she answered. "Harvey, I sometimes think that it would be better if—if we didn't see each other, at all events for a while."

"Madeleine, why?"

"My father begins to ask questions about my frequent absence from town. Auntie, too, wonders what inducement I can have for such long and lonely rambles."

They laughed, and she went on: "And sometimes it seems to me it would be better for us not to meet for a while, until——" She paused.

He knew the meaning. Until he could stand out in the light of day before his fellow-men who only knew him by his work, throwing off the mysterious cloak of reserve and self-exclusion, the reason for wearing which he never yet had told her.

Swiftly he formed his resolve; he would tell her now, there should be no secret between them, she would believe him, aye! against the world, and in the ardour of his newly-formed resolve he bitterly reproached himself. Why had he not formed and carried out that plan before.

"Ah! Why?"

For it was now too late.

"Very charming and restful," a well-known voice drawled.

Turning, she and her lover stood face to face with—Eric Geldart. The two men faced each other defiantly, and Madeleine, with a strange foreboding tremor in her heart, noted the angry light in their eyes, but with perfect self-command she said:

"How do you do, Mr. Geldart. I didn't know that you were up the river."

"Or perhaps you would have been elsewhere," and she, blazing up at the impertinence, answered:

"I should have consulted my own inclination."

"And of course your friend's—which is equally of course the same thing."

"At all events," said Ronald, "that is no concern of yours."

"How dare you address me!" said Eric Geldart. "You know that I do not desire—more than that, I will not tolerate any communication with you."

"You, you Judas! it is not you who cut me off, it is I who abjure you."

So angrily they faced each other; somehow the same fierce light in the eyes of both, the same tightening of the lips and the setting of the jaws, that Madeleine, filled with a strange alarm, cried:

"Gentlemen—gentlemen! Mr. Geldart—Eric—what right have you to address such words to Mr. Harvey Bligh?"

"What!" Eric, crouching like a panther, with clenched hands and set face, hissed between his teeth, "Mr.—Harvey—Bligh—why, then, at last the veil is torn aside, now I understand it all! So having disgraced one name, having under one name robbed our dead father of his gold, under another you seek to steal from me that which I prize above all treasure in the world!"

"Coward! Liar!" And in their mad passion they would have flown at each other's throats, but that with clasped, uplifted hands she sprang between them:

"Eric! Harvey! Oh, no, not Harvey!"

There was an agonising quiver in her lips, her voice, her heart, as she uttered these last words. He had deceived her. Whether the cruel accusation she had heard concerning Ronald Geldart, the alleged black sheep, had truth or falsehood at its back, he had lied to her, had wooed her in disguise. What right had he to woo her love even as he wooed the public favour, under a false name; how could she be sure that Harvey Bligh was even his own *nom de plume*, if all that was said of him was true? Oh, horrible! perhaps he had stolen that! And yet—she loved him, loved him so dearly that turning to him she said:

"Tell this man he lies."

"He lies!" said Ronald, "with a half lie that is the worst lie of all. I never robbed my father. It is true that poor dead dad was brought to believe that cruel lie, and on account of it disinherited me."

"Then it is true that you are Ronald Geldart, his brother?"

"It is true," he said. "I am his brother, even as Abel was the brother of the man who slew him."

"I shall not leave you two men here to quarrel. Harvey Bligh—oh, no! there is no real Harvey Bligh, it's only a name—a label things are sold under. Good night—good night! Eric, you will take me back to the Oaklands. I know not which of you is Cain and which is Abel, but I will not leave you together with Cain in both your hearts!"

TWENTIETH CHAPTER.

Eric Resorts to Strategy.

"Eric," said Boanerges Blagdon one morning as M.P. strolled into his partner's room. "Look here!" His fat hand trembled as he handed a letter in the handwriting of Clare Armitage.

Eric, recognising that hand at a glance, bent his brows thunderously.

"So!" he said more to himself than the other, "she's going to be troublesome, the she-cat. What's her little game?" He glanced at the missive which, omitting formal parts, ran:

"*You know what I have done and risked for Eric, you know the bargain and the bond between us. He has broken that bond, repudiated that bargain, defies, dares, spurns me. Now I warn you unless he keeps his word, lets Lynton's girl go, and makes me his wedded wife, I will speak out. You were in the swim with us and you too must suffer, people are already whispering about you, wondering what agony of remorse led to that strange exhibition of yours at your meeting, and I have one more trump card left. If Eric Geldart spurns me I go to Ronald Geldart. I am told he is still in England; he has been seen in London, if Eric Geldart will not repair the wrong he has done me I will repair the wrong that he has done his brother, and that will mean his ruin and your own.*"

"Well!" said Eric, tossing the letter on to the table. But the other was in a far more worried mood.

"What's to be done? You know what a wilful, wayward creature she is, and, besides, that was the bargain between you; you told her you'd marry her when you were a mere nobody, a woman doesn't release a man lightly from that promise, especially when he becomes a somebody. I told you too not so long ago that Ronnie was still in England."

"I know he is," said the other.

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes."

"What happened?"

"Murder would have happened, only someone else was there."

"Well, Eric, what are you going to do? You're not going to risk that woman speaking out."

"Certainly not."

"But there's only one way of silencing her."

"Really. What's your way?"

"You'll have to marry her."

"I'll see her somewhere else first."

"I expect it will be pretty much the same thing for her."

"I never suspected you of so much humour, Boney, but that's not my way."

"What is your way?'"

"If you weren't such a coward I'd tell you, only for the present we must have her watched."

"Who's to watch her?"

"People who's trade is watching. I can't commission them, you can't commission them, we must get somebody

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to employ a private detective agency to shadow her every movement and report weekly, daily, and hourly, if need be."

"Yes, but who's your man?"

"He isn't a man, he's a shred. I've got him at my finger's ends, a fellow Scrimshaw employs to copy letters, swear at, and run errands. I've been civil to the fellow because I know what a wisp he is, but shred of a man that he is, he's in the opposition stable. I can get, through him, at Scrimshaw's waste-paper basket, now and then at his correspondence; the man's a bounder.

"Because I'm M.P. and a bit of a personage nowadays he fawns on and kow-tows to me, a nod and I won his confidence, a handshake, and 'How do you do, old fellow?' and he's my slave. I'll ask him to my club to dinner, and he'll sell his soul to me to be able to brag about it."

"What's his name?"

"I almost forget—what the dickens is it?"

"What's he like?"

"A flabby, underdone face, straw hair, no chin, a lot of collar. Oh! I know the name, Spring—Sprinkle—Springle!"

"And then," said Boanerges, "supposing we find Clare communicating with your brother?"

"Why, then," replied Eric, "Boanerges, we must, as the Frenchmen say, take our courage in both hands." He added to the words a significant nod, and there was an angry shimmer in his eyes that made his partner's flesh creep.

"Eric," he whispered, "we mustn't do anything very—very—desperate."

"Look here," said the other, leaning across the table, in an undertone, that smote Blagdon's ears and Blagdon's heart more than any other man's shout would have done. "Consider what I stand to win, consider what I stand to lose. Do you think I'm the man to take a licking lying down?"

"No! No! I know you too well."

"You know the game I'm playing, you know the stakes I'm playing for. Men who play my game have use for neither sentiment nor scruple. If Clare Armitage resolves to be my stumbling-block I shall resolve on her removal, the consequences will be on her head."

Mr. Springle, occupied ostensibly with the uncongenial task of indexing the current letter-book of the Cosmopolitan Trust and Exchange Limited, was actually engrossed in mind with the recollection of the triumph achieved on the previous evening by the inimitable Blarer in his song, "The Missus has Slumped my Togs," and the reflected honour that had radiated round himself when later in the evening Blarer himself, gorgeous in his fur-coat, his diamond rings and stud, condescended to accept Mr. Springle's invitation to have a drink with him.

The recollection was marred to some extent by the fact that Blarer had called for, instead of the expected Scotch-and-soda, a bottle of fizz, but after all the greater the cost the greater the glory. Blarer had drunk with him, had said "Cheer-oh, old man" to him in the presence of the world, as represented by the *habitués* of the lounge at The Eldorado.

He was aroused from this reverie by the catch-bell of the plate-glass door, and hopped off his stool, exclaiming:

"Why, Mr. Geldart, it's you, sir. Here, Triggs, confound you! Set a chair for Mr. Geldart. What do you mean, sir, by letting a distinguished visitor wait there?"

This to the office boy, who a few minutes earlier he had threatened with divers pains and penalties if he discontinued the paging of a number of documents he handed him, and then suavely stroking his hands, he remarked to Geldart:

"I am extremely sorry, sir, Mr. Scrimshaw has gone early this afternoon to the House on a committee, sir."

"Ah, well, never mind about that, it's really you I want to see, Mr. Springle, if we can have ten minutes chat."

"By all means, sir," replied Springle, "please step into

(*Continued overleaf.*)

SEIGEL'S SYRUP

Food, well digested, is the origin of strength. Imperfectly digested or **not** digested, as in dyspepsia, it is the fruitful source of illness. Every act, every thought, every movement of muscle or mind uses up some of the substance of our bodies. Food repairs this loss, but **only** when it is digested. Undigested food is worse than useless—it is dangerous. It ferments in the stomach, poisons the blood, starves the body, and lowers vitality.

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SEIGEL'S SYRUP

"For many years," writes Mr. A. Pike, of 1 Mary Street, Point, Cowes, Isles of Wight, "I suffered from indigestion. At night the pain across my chest was so severe that I used to get up and pace the room in agony. When the pain had subsided somewhat, I would return to bed and fall asleep through sheer exhaustion; but the morning found me fagged out, quite unfit for the day's work before me. A few doses of Mother Seigel's Syrup enabled me to eat a hearty meal without suffering any pain after. As I continued taking that remedy, I felt stronger, could do a hard day's work, sleep well, and wake in the morning refreshed and ready for my work.

CURES INDIGESTION.

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the governor's room," and in a few minutes Eric was seated in Scrimshaw's sanctum along with Mr. Springle.

"Now," he said, "before I mention my business you are quite sure I am not taking you from your important duties. I know what a deal you have to do, and how important your work and your time are, especially with Scrimshaw away."

"Oh, pray don't mention it, sir," said the junior clerk, wishing that Mrs. Skimper and all her paying guests were there to hear. "Of course, when the governor's away a great deal devolves on me, but in your case, Mr. Geldart, we make an exception."

"Very well, then, we'll begin talking business, but perhaps you wouldn't mind asking your subordinates not to disturb us," and Springle strode to the door of the general office and informed the office boy, the only person subordinate to him in the establishment, and in his most imposing manner impressed upon that youth that he and Mr. Eric Geldart, M.P., were not to be disturbed on any account."

Meantime, Eric Geldart, left alone in Scrimshaw's room, took an opportunity of peering in the pigeon-holes and over masses of correspondence, generally availing himself to the utmost of Springle's absence to pick up various crumbs of information.

"Now," said Eric, on his return, "I have a little matter of a rather delicate nature, and I came to you, knowing that you are not only cute but discreet as well, that you are as discreet as you are cute."

It's doubtful whether, had Mr. Springle known the sense in which the words were spoken, he would have beamed quite so effusively. As it was, he inquired eagerly the nature of the commission, expressing his willingness to accomplish it if he had to jump over a house, or if it snowed.

"Of course," said Eric, "I'll take care to make it worth your while."

Springle beamed again.

"It's really very simple. I want you to go to Varney's, the private inquiry people, and commission them to shadow a young lady."

"A young lady! Oh, I say, Mr. Geldart, what a lot of trouble the fairies do give us!"

"They are to report to you, and I'll get you to wire me from time to time, making an appointment at my house or my club, when over a bit of lunch or supper you can transmit their report to me."

"Why, certainly," said Mr. Springle, elated at the social distinction as well as the emolument in store for him, and reflecting what a telling item of conversation it would beat Mrs. Skimper's table, the casual remark that he had been lunching with or supping with "My friend Geldart, the member for Little Claverton." Why, Grimmage would turn positively green!

"I'm on it like a shot," he said. "I'll see Varney's this afternoon. What's the lady's name?"

"She is Miss Clare Armitage, and lives in Bolsize Gardens. Of course, Springle, old chap, you won't breathe a word of this to Scrimshaw."

The "old chap" completed the capture. Springle was bound hand and foot.

"Not a word, Mr. Geldart," he said. "You know I don't in the least look on Scrimshaw as I do on you. We ain't pals in any sense of the word. I give him my time and my work here for a consideration, there's an end of it—between you and me, he's not much class."

"By-the-bye, he's been a bit mysterious lately, your boss, what's he got on?"

"I don't quite know," answered Springle, "there's something on the board; he puts in a lot of time here after hours and he's bustling about like an electric whirligig, which is his way when he's bringing off anything new or big, but, to tell the truth, I can't quite stand him, and I don't invite his confidence much, except when I want to know anything it pays me to find out. I can do a bit of ferreting."

"Yes, yes, Springle," said the other, "you're very, very clever at ferreting, ver—y, and I want you to do a little ferreting for me—on a consideration, of course."

"What, in the office, Mr. Geldart? I don't mind, sir, so long as it ain't risky, because you know if Scrimshaw did find me prying into affairs he didn't want me to, he'd not only fire me from here, but there's no knowing quite what he wouldn't do, and he's a scorcher when he's riled."

"You're quite right, Springle," replied Eric sententiously, "and I should think that a man of your intellect finds it very often a bit of a trial to tolerate him."

"You've just hit it. Do you know I've frequently felt that I must dismiss——I mean leave him, but then he's useful in a way."

"Yes?" said the other, "and there's no knowing what may turn up. For instance, I may later on be changing my secretary, he's rather an elderly man, and in politics of course one occasionally has opportunities of helping one's friends, you understand? And, by-the-bye, meantime you will, as heretofore, kindly let me know anything that transpires, particularly affecting my interests inside this establishment."

"Certainly, Mr. Geldart, and if at any time you do happen to know of anything that will suit me, I'd chuck Scrimshaw at a moment's notice," said Mr. Springle, eagerly and volubly knowing how imminent the chance of dismissal had hovered over him ever since he had entered the offices of the Cosmopolitan Trust and Exchange Limited.

"By-the-bye, is there anything you want particular attention paid to with regard to this young lady's movements, Any other chap you suspect her of meeting, eh? You see I'm pretty wide, I am!" and Springle sniggered sapiently.

"Oh, as to that," answered Eric, "I want to know her movements generally. And yet, by the bye," he added quickly on second thoughts, "yes, there is one man with regard to whom I want her movements particularly closely watched, that is a certain"—his brother's real name was on the tip of his tongue, then he reflected that possibly he would be more generally known by his assumed one, so he said, "Mr. Harvey Bligh."

"Harvey Bligh! What, the chap who writes, that people have been making such a fuss about?"

"Yes. Have you heard of him?" asked Eric, somewhat surprised to find Springle acquainted with even a modern novelist.

"Heard of him? Should think I have! Why, I know him!" Eric started. "What, you know Harvey Bligh, the author?"

"Yes, the chap that writes the verses and the short stories for *The Meteor*. Why, he stays sometimes at the boarding-house where I am a paying guest; used to live there regularly before he made his mark. Ah! and he was on pretty hard pan, too, till all of a sudden he went up like a rocket. Nowadays he's rambling all over the country, making a good thing out of his work, and I fancy he doesn't care for town much; in fact, I've always thought there's a little bit of a story about Mr. Bligh independent of those he writes, and this seems to confirm it."

"By Jove!" said Eric, "do you like Bligh?"

"I hate him," said Springle, "the bumptious, over-bearing bounder!" For it was Springle's way to attribute his own peculiar characteristics to such as excited his disapproval, and he added viciously: "I've got a little score against him; if ever I get a chance to pay it off, I'm there!"

"Why, Springle," said Eric, "it seems to me your chance may some day come. Keep your eye on him; let me know whom he meets, where he goes; if possible, Springle, what letters he receives; and, look here, his letters might be worth a few pounds to me, *and* to you; keep this in earnest of what I shall give you later.

"But, by the bye, don't mention my name or indicate that you are at all in touch with me in his presence." He pushed a couple of five pound notes across the table to Springle, and leaving the office, returned to his cab muttering to himself: "By Jove! that's killing two birds with one stone!"

(Another long instalment next week.)

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Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of SHORT STORIES.*]*

Between Two Stools.

"ABOUT a month ago," writes "DAUNTLESS" "I made the acquaintance of two girls. One of them was in the habit of going out with a young man, but since I got to know her, she has broken it off. I have now grown very fond of her. How should I act? I have on several occasions been out with the other girl, who says she is very fond of me?"

* * * * *

You are rather fickle, "DAUNTLESS," in thus trifling with two girls, especially as you say you are very fond of the one, and that she has made a sacrifice on your behalf. Stick to the one you are most fond of, and avoid getting too intimate with the other. When a girl sees that a man is fonder of her friend than herself, she will, in most cases, withdraw from the contest, out of friendship.

A Stab in the Dark.

"W. E. R." has been the victim of a spiteful anonymous letter writer. He is engaged to be married, but the other day his *fiancée* received an anonymous letter which stated that "W. E. R." had led a very wild life, and was not a suitable husband for the girl. "W. E. R." believes the letter to come from a girl he once knew, but whom he has never in any way injured. How should he act?

* * * * *

Anonymous letters are best ignored. Your sweetheart should be made to understand the facts of your past career, and how far the letter was written out of spite. If you have good reason to know who wrote it, put the letter in the hands of a solicitor, and warn the writer against sending any more letters of the same kind.

The Father Again.

"I AM deeply in love with a girl," writes "MAX," "and my feeling is returned. We have decided that we are thoroughly suited to be man and wife. However, my means are limited, and the girl's father has told me that he cannot allow his daughter to marry me until I can point to a larger income. Her mother, however, is strongly in favour of our becoming engaged. What is the best thing for me to do?"

* * * * *

I think you should respect her father's wishes inasmuch as you should do your utmost to prove to him that, if you are not at present well off, you will be in future. Meanwhile, just continue paying attentions, and with the help of her mother—generally a powerful ally—the sterner parent may sooner or later relent. When young people show themselves determined in love affairs, the hardest of fathers has been known to give way. At all events, do not incur his displeasure.

Deserted by a Lover.

"MAY" has been engaged to "FRED" for six months. Both were very happy until a few weeks ago, when "FRED" met another girl, of whom he seems very fond, and neglects "MAY'S" society to be with her. When spoken to on the subject, he refuses to have an understanding. "MAY" does not know what to do. Should she break off the engagement, or try to win back his love?

* * * * *

It seems by far the nicer alternative to try to win back his love, if "MAY" has that in her power. At the same time, she should give the young man to understand that so long as he continues to pay attention to another girl, "MAY" will hold herself free to act as she likes. If another young man appeared on the scene, perhaps "MAY'S" neglectful *fiancé* would suddenly return to his old love. "MAY" might try the experiment.

A Soldier's Difficulty.

"JACK" is a soldier, quartered in India. He is married, and when he was transferred to his present regiment, went to India for twelve months. At the end of that time he wrote and asked his wife to go out to him, but she refused, saying that "India was not a fit country for a decent woman." She had gained this impression from a few discontented soldiers, but "JACK" does not agree at all. He has another five years to spend out there, and has stopped sending his wife money unless she agrees to go to India. As a result of this, she has written to his commanding officer to get some of his pay stopped, a course likely to injure him.

* * * * *

Your wife is doing wrong in refusing to go out to you. When a woman marries a soldier she should be prepared to accompany him anywhere where his regiment is stationed. If she refuses, then she lays herself open to action such as you have taken. Why not lay the matter before your commanding officer? There must be very many cases such as your own, and his advice would be your best reply to your wife, as she has written to him.

A Boy's Love Affair.

"I KNOW a girl of twenty-two," writes "LOUVAIN," "who is engaged to an officer abroad. We have always been a great deal together and nobody has ever said anything. The only thing is that I am quite young—sixteen, in fact—and though it seems conceited, I may say I am very good-looking. The other day, on returning from a party and saying 'Good-night,' she kissed me, and I returned it. I now know that she is passionately fond of me, and I am devoted to her. What is now the honourable course to pursue?"

* * * * *

To leave the young lady alone, "LOUVAIN"—or rather, to see that she leaves you alone, for she is very much older than you, and is really acting very wrongly in putting temptation in your way. You are very young and cannot even think of marriage for six years or more. By that time the girl will be twenty-eight—very much your senior, and you will probably have entirely altered your mind about many matters. I daresay the girl is passionately fond of you, but probably regards you more in the light of a pet or a toy than as a serious lover. As she is engaged, it is your duty to avoid becoming too intimate with her, as trouble can only result for both of you in the future. I think this is a case in which a girl is trifling with a boy's affections, as she can scarcely be really in love with one so much younger than herself.

Cynthia

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The advertisement pages of the papers, and the hoardings, have been for some time past particularly noticeable for advertisements of new mixtures and compounds professing to cure many serious diseases. Numbers of sufferers have been induced by the publication of strange stories of sensational cures or "telling testimonials" in appealing language, to give these so-called remedies a trial. In many cases what bitter disappointment must have resulted! But, fortunately, wise folk generally refrain from experimenting on their health with strange nostrums. These people keep well and robust by taking from time to time, and in due season, the thoroughly tried and undoubted remedy **BEECHAM'S PILLS.** Notwithstanding the number of new preparations, most of them of foreign introduction, and the startling methods adopted in placing them before the public, the trusted medicine—**BEECHAM'S PILLS**—still stands foremost, both in point of popularity and in demand.

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